

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 34

The Stone Hellephant Wall

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Reviving Yu Wei

Ji Ning, Winesage, and Ninedust were all rather dazed as they watched the three Hegemons and numerous supreme Eternal Emperors fly towards them. Ning immediately recognized the white-bearded old man with six curved horns on his head as Hegemon Brightshore.

As for the other two Hegemons, one was a dazzlingly beautiful scepter-bearing woman; when Ning saw her, he felt as though he had seen the most beautiful creature in all of existence and felt the uncontrollable desire to venerate her. It was impossible for anyone to feel any untoward thoughts regarding her at all! The second Hegemon was a man with long green hair and a big green beard. His hair, his eyebrows, and his beard were all extremely long.

“Darknorth.” Brightshore Hegemon smiled. “Let me make the introductions. This gentleman here is Hegemon Windrain of the Aberrants.”

Ning looked at the green-haired, green-bearded man. Hegemon Windrain had a very unusual aura. When Ning looked at him, he felt as though he was staring at a vast forest of trees. “Greetings, Hegemon Windrain,” Ning said respectfully.

This person stood at the very apex of power within the Endless Territories. How could Ning dare to be disrespectful in the slightest?

“Darknorth, my young friend, you really are quite impressive. There are only nine command talismans in there, but you acquired eight of them. Impressive, impressive!” Hegemon Windrain praised.

“What?” Ning, Ninedust, and Winesage were all stunned. They looked at each other. None of them had publicized the fact that Ninedust had given Ning three talismans while Winesage had given Ning two.

“Don’t feel so surprised,” Hegemon Brightshore said. “Realmsoul Polo informed us.”

“Oh.” Now Ning and the others understood.

“Let me continue with the introductions.” Hegemon Brightshore’s voice turned a bit cool as he glanced at the woman: “This is Hegemon Netherlily of the Ancient cultivators.”

“My young friend Darknorth.” Hegemon Netherlily was surpassingly beautiful and her voice was extremely soft; one couldn’t help but feel friendly towards her. She smiled as she looked at Ning. “You are such an impressive talent, but you ended up joining the Brightshore Kingdom. What a pity! It’s all because this old fellow Brightshore is so completely shameless as to randomly abduct cultivators throughout the Endless Territories and bring them to the Brightshore Kingdom. If it wasn’t for that, given the relationship between you and Ninedust, I feel confident that you might choose to end up joining us.”

The Ancient cultivators, much like the Brightshore Kingdom, did allow certain cultivators to join them.

“Jealousy. That’s just jealousy talking,” Hegemon Brightshore said coolly.

Although Ning had been abducted by the Brightshore Kingdom, he didn’t feel any resentment towards Hegemon Brightshore. If it hadn’t been for the guidance provided by the Brightshore Kingdom, the many sword-arts he had given access to within the Sword Palace, and the chance to visit the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe he visited, he might not have been able to develop his Omega Sword Dao!

“This gentleman right here is Emperor Goldisle of the Dao Alliance.” Hegemon Brightshore was slightly nervous, as the Dao Alliance would definitely be his greatest competitor in bidding for the fruits which Ning had acquired. “Emperor Goldisle is one of the two leaders of the Dao Alliance.”

“Darknorth and I have met.” The gold-furred alien smiled as he looked at Ning.

“Mm. And this gentleman is Emperor Islehide of the Aeonians.” Hegemon Brightshore didn’t want to give Emperor Goldisle the chance to chat too much with Ning, and so he immediately began to introduce the others. Emperor Islehide was a peerlessly handsome man who was even

more attractive than Hegemon Netherlily was beautiful. He had long red hair and dim red eyes that were filled with a strange charisma.

“Darknorth.” Emperor Islehide smiled slightly as he glanced at Ning.

Ning immediately replied, “Emperor Islehide.”

“The last one is Emperor Severfive of the Dark Kingdom.” Hegemon Brightshore glanced sideways at the rather bizarre-looking alien elder, whose long blue hair flowed up from his head like a pair of wings.

“Daolord Darknorth.” Emperor Severfive looked at Ning with a very sincere and modest gaze. Those who actually interacted with the Emperors of the Dark Kingdom all knew that the Dark Kingdom was actually quite low-key and modest. They were outsiders and foreigners who were despised and ostracized by the native organizations of the Endless Territories and thus couldn’t afford to be too brash.

“The people I’ve just introduced you to are more than capable of representing the six organizations in the Endless Territories,” Hegemon Brightshore said.

Aside from the six, there were also a number of retainers and servants present. For example, Hegemon Brightshore had a single-horned youth who had a very ordinary aura standing by his side, while Emperor Islehide of the Aeonians had an ordinary looking white-robed woman standing next to him.

“Come over here, Winesage,” Emperor Severfive instructed.

“Coming.” Winesage obediently walked over to Emperor Severfive’s side.

“Redwater.” Hegemon Netherlily looked at Ninedust, who immediately and obediently flew over to her side as well.

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Faced with the supreme leaders of the six greatest powers in the Endless Territories, Ning couldn’t help but feel a sense of pressure... but he also felt excitement! These were the people who might have the answers as to how he could revive his wife. Even if they couldn’t do it, they would

definitely know much more about it than he did.

“Darknorth, we need some of the coldflame cauldron fruits,” Emperor Severfive of the Dark Kingdom said hurriedly. “Just tell me what you need.”

“Don’t be so hasty.” Emperor Goldisle of the Dao Alliance said calmly, “Why don’t we let Darknorth list what he needs first. The side which can assist him the most shall be the side Darknorth chooses.” The Dao Alliance was able to speak so confidently due to their great wealth.

“Agreed.” Hegemon Brightshore nodded.

“Yes, let our young friend Darknorth tell us what he needs,” Hegemon Netherlily agreed.

“My young friend?” Hegemon Windrain looked at Ning.

The three Hegemons were the strongest experts in the Endless Territories and had been alive for extremely long periods of time. As a result, they were also quite wealthy, which was why they dared to compete against the Dao Alliance in this manner.

“Seniors...” Ning said respectfully, “There is indeed something I would like to request.”

“Speak,” Emperor Goldisle said confidently. The three Hegemons as well as Emperor Severfive and Emperor Islehide all looked at Ning.

“I once had a beloved Dao-companion,” Ning said slowly. “Long ago, she perished. The main reason why I’ve trained so hard is primarily because I wish to bring her back to life.”

When Winesage and Ninedust heard this, they stared at Ning in shock. Revive a Dao-companion? None of them had ever imagined that Ning held a secret like this in his heart.

“Revive?” Hegemon Windrain’s green brows furrowed in a frown. “I imagine her soul and truesoul were shattered?” If her truesoul was still around, reviving her would be extremely easy.

“Correct.” Ning nodded.

All three of the Hegemons exchanged glances, as did the three Eternal Emperors.

“I’ll ask the questions,” Hegemon Netherlily said. The others all nodded towards her.

“Darknorth, when your Dao-companion died, had she reached the World level of power?” Hegemon Netherlily’s gaze was very gentle, as was her voice.

“She had not.” Ning immediately explained, “She was merely a Celestial Immortal.”

Hegemon Netherlily nodded slightly. “Mm. Fairly weak. There’s still a chance at reviving her.”

Ning was wildly overjoyed upon hearing this.

“My next question is, where did she die?” Hegemon Netherlily asked, “Did she die in an everworld? A chaosworld? In the emptiness of space? Or in an alternate universe?”

“She died in my homeland, in a chaosworld,” Ning explained.

“In a chaosworld?” Hegemon Netherlily frowned. “That makes things difficult.”

“Difficult?” Ning’s heart clenched.

“Reviving those who died in everworlds is the simplest; any Hegemon is capable of doing this,” Hegemon Netherlily explained. “Reviving those who died in alternate universes, also known as otherverses, is a bit more difficult. Reviving those who died in chaosworlds or in the emptiness of space is the most difficult of all. Although she was merely a Celestial Immortal, this still isn’t something the likes of us are capable of.”

Ning’s face turned pale.

“Darknorth.” The nearby Hegemon Brightshore explained, “Everworlds contain the rules and laws established by the Eternal Emperors who created them. You can view them as basic, rudimentary versions of the prime essences. For example, if the founding Emperor established a law

that ‘the skies are dark’, the skies in that everworld shall forever be dark. If he says that ‘flying is impossible’, then no one will be able to fly in that everworld. The only way to get around this is through possessing so much brute force that one can resist the binding effects of those laws.”

“Everworlds have elementary prime essences within them, and those who die in an everworld shall return to those everworld prime essences. If you wish to twist spacetime and revive a Celestial Immortal, you would only need to resist the backlash from the everworld. Everworld’s are fairly weak; most Hegemons are capable of doing such a thing.”

“Otherverses are generally the same size as a realmverse. You’ve visited one of them in the past,” Hegemon Brightshore explained. “I think you understand that these otherverses have their own prime essences, and their prime essences are far more perfect than the ones within the everworlds!”

Ning nodded.

“The various otherverses all have their own prime essences. If a cultivator dies in one of those otherverses, his or her truesoul shall return to the prime essences of that otherverse. If you wish to revive someone, you must be able to endure the backlash generated by that entire alternate universe,” Hegemon Brightshore explained.

“As for chaosworlds or the void of space? They don’t have any prime essences they belong to, and so whenever a truesoul in a chaosworld is extinguished, its energy shall revert back to the Chaosverse itself. If you wish to revive such a person, you’ll need to be able to endure the backlash generated by the entire Chaosverse! This is a terrifying concept,” Hegemon Brightshore explained.

Reviving someone in an everworld was easy?

Reviving someone in an otherverse was hard?

Reviving someone from the Chaosverse was nearly impossible?

Ning’s face grew uglier and uglier as he absorbed this information. “What exactly is a ‘realmverse’? And what is the ‘Chaosverse’?”

He remembered that the Starflow race which lived in the Terror Starsea had once lived in a place named the Peacock Lotus Realmverse. A grand war had destroyed that realmverse, resulting in the Starflow race fleeing and moving to the Endless Territories.

“Our home, the Endless Territories, is a realmverse,” Hegemon Brightshore explained. “Its true name is the Flamedragon Realmverse.”

“As for the Chaosverse, it is the source of all things and is truly infinite beyond measure...” Hegemon Brightshore explained, “It is like a vast, endless sea. Realmverses are like small reefs within that vast sea! Otherverses are another type of reef, a fairly special type. All reefs are located extremely far from each other, and so the Great Dark is the vast emptiness between reefs. All realmverses are very, very far away from each other.”

The sea? Reefs? Ning was rather dazed by all this. The alternate universes and the ‘Endless Territories’ were nothing more than ‘reefs’, while the Chaosverse was an ocean?

“Then who is strong enough to resist the backlash from the Chaosverse and revive my Dao-companion?” Ning grew increasingly anxious.

“Your Dao-companion was only a Celestial Immortal. Although reviving her will be difficult, at least there is hope,” Hegemon Netherlily said.

Chapter 2: Autarch

“Hope?” Ji Ning’s eyes lit up.

Hegemon Netherlily, Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, Emperor Severfive, Emperor Goldisle, and Emperor Islehide all secretly shook their heads. Hegemon Netherlily continued, “There is no way for an Eternal Emperor to resist the backlash from the Chaosverse. Only those legendary figures who are even more powerful than Eternal Emperors can accomplish it... only they can reverse spacetime and revive your Dao-companion.”

“Even more powerful than Eternal Emperors?” Ning was stunned, as were Ninedust and Winesage. There was a level of power beyond that of the Eternal Emperors?

“The Chaosverse is vast and without end, filled with realmverses and otherverses.” Hegemon Netherlily’s voice was soft and drifting. “The most powerful figures who stand at the apex of each realmverse or otherverse are almost always the Hegemons! However... the vast Chaosverse has figures of even greater power. We respectfully address them as ‘Autarch’.”

“Autarch?” Ning immediately engraved this title into his heart.

Hegemon Brightshore nodded, a look of eagerness in his eyes. “Yes. Autarchs! Everworlds are created by Eternal Emperors... and otherverses are created by Autarchs.”

“They created the otherverses?” Ning was stunned. He had been to one of those alternate universes before. It had contained a complete set of prime essences, such as the Dao of the Sword and many other Daos. All of those things could be sensed! How could such a universe have been artificially created?

“Autarchs are the true and absolute rulers of the Chaosverse who stand above all other living beings,” Hegemon Netherlily said. “We Eternal Emperors have developed our own eternal Daos... but that isn’t the true apex of cultivation. Only by making repeated breakthroughs and raising your Dao to a level where it can become one of the prime essences of the

universe can a cultivator be capable of creating an otherverse.”

“Autarchs are incredibly rare. I’ve never met any of them in my entire life.” Hegemon Brightshore shook his head, while the other two Hegemons revealed looks of envy and admiration. They hadn’t met any Autarchs either; they had only heard of them.

“When the Sithe launched that war, it encompassed a great many places. The main reason why we cultivators were able to gain victory over them was because we had our Autarchs,” Hegemon Brightshore said. “Although the Sithe were extremely strong and incredibly advanced in many areas, the Autarchs led us to completely wipe the Sithe out in the end. If it wasn’t for the Autarchs, we probably would’ve been annihilated or enslaved long ago.”

Ning, Ninedust, and Winesage were all speechless. Autarchs? So the highest level of cultivation in the Chaosverse was the Autarch level?

“They are capable of reversing spacetime and roam through the Chaosverse with ease! They are even capable of creating those alternate universes...” Hegemon Brightshore continued, “If an Autarch was willing to spend the time, he would be able to destroy even the likes of the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels that threaten and will eventually annihilate our Flamedragon Realmverse.”

“Autarchs are capable of destroying the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels?” The nearby Winesage couldn’t help but ask, “Then why don’t we invite them to help out? Are they really going to just watch as such a vast realmverse is annihilated?”

“You are mistaken,” Hegemon Windrain replied. “Autarchs view things through a completely different lens than the rest of us. An Autarch once said that all things and all creatures in the universe must follow the natural cycle of life and death. The Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels were born from the primordial chaos for the express purpose of wiping out the Flamedragon Realmverse. In other words, it is part of the laws and functioning of the Chaosverse. If they were to forcibly destroy the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, they would suffer a backlash from the Chaosverse

itself, and an incredibly strong one at that. The Autarchs are not willing to do such a thing.”

“Autarchs have truly transcended beyond all things. They are absolutely invincible, and neither spacetime nor karma nor anything else have any impact on them at all.”

“To them, the birth and destruction of entire realmverses is nothing more than the blooming and withering of a flower. I have never even seen an Autarch in my entire life.” Hegemon Windrain looked at Ning.

“Darknorth, my young friend... only an Autarch is capable of rescuing your Dao-companion.”

Ning’s heart sank. He had to ask an Autarch to intervene? The three Hegemons had been around for countless years, but none of them had even seen an Autarch. One could only imagine how difficult it would be to actually get an Autarch to help out!

“Are these fruits enough?” Ning asked.

“Haha...” Emperor Goldisle laughed. “Not even close. Not even close! A hundred times this amount of fruit still wouldn’t be enough.”

“If you want an Autarch to revive your Dao-companion... if you actually owned the Crimsonwave Temple and offered it to an Autarch as a gift, you might succeed.” Hegemon Brightshore shook his head and laughed. “The fruits you have ripen every few thousand chaos cycles. Crimsonwave Temple can produce more and more fruit unto perpetuity.” Crimsonwave Temple itself was worth far more than a hundred times as much as all of the fruits Ning had acquired.

“Ah!” Ning instantly understood.

“So there’s nothing I can do right now, right?” Ning asked.

“Right. None of us can do what you ask. Only an Autarch can.” Hegemon Brightshore looked at Ning. “But at least there is hope. If your Dao-companion was at the World level or was a Samsara Daolord, the backlash generated by reviving them would be exponentially greater. By then, you would have no chance at all.”

“Right.” Ning quickly calmed down again. Prior to speaking to these major powers for the first time regarding the revival of Yu Wei, Ning had already mentally prepared himself for failure. Others might feel despair at this response... but Ning was actually filled with vigor! This was because he was still just a Daolord of the Third Step. Once he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step and further improved his [Heartsword] arts, he might indeed be able to acquire treasures that were as valuable as Crimsonwave Temple.

“What if I was really able to acquire something as valuable as Crimsonwave Temple?” Ning couldn’t help but ask this follow-up question. “How would I go about finding an Autarch then?”

“You wouldn’t need to,” Emperor Goldisle said. “The Dao Alliance would help you send the word to the Autarch.”

“Oh?” Ning glanced at Emperor Goldisle in surprise. The Dao Alliance’s resources truly were unfathomable. It was actually capable of sending information to an Autarch?

“But remember, given that Crimsonwave Temple is capable of giving birth to a new crop of fruits every few thousand chaos cycles or so, its value is far greater than that of the fruits you have acquired thus far. In fact, it’s worth much more than all of the treasures I’ve accumulated over the course of countless years.” Hegemon Brightshore smiled as he looked at Ning. “Darknorth, it won’t be easy for you to acquire something as valuable as Crimsonwave Temple. You need to mentally prepare yourself for this task.”

“If you wish to reap great rewards, you’ll need to be prepared for taking on great dangers,” Hegemon Windrain said. “For example, the Terror Starsea. The Terror Starsea was part of the Dawn War’s battlefield and is filled with many leftover relics and treasures, but it’s also filled with countless dangers. If you are willing and able to take on the necessary risk, you might be able to find Hegemon-level relics or even powerful treasures left behind by the Sithe race. It’s entirely possible that you’ll find something as valuable as Crimsonwave Temple.”

“Right.” Ning nodded.

The three mighty Hegemons didn’t dare to take on too much risk without a good reason, as they were the pillars of their respective organizations. The Terror Starsea was simply too dangerous; even Hegemons might die in there if they were unlucky. The negative repercussions were simply too grave, which was why it was generally only the Daolords who dared to risk it. Daolords only stood an ephemeral chance of succeeding at the Daomerge anyhow!

“Autarchs, eh?” Ning silently reflected on this term. Autarchs, the most supreme existences of the cultivation world, the leaders who led the cultivators to victory over the Sithe...

“We are unable to reverse spacetime and revive your Dao-companion. Darknorth, what else do you plan to trade your fruits for?” Hegemon Brightshore asked.

“Speak, Darknorth. What do you need?”

“Just state your requests.”

Emperor Goldisle, Hegemon Windrain, and the others all looked at Ning as they spoke.

Since reviving Yu Wei was impossible for now, he would have to focus on further strengthening himself. Only then would he stand a chance at acquiring a treasure equivalent to Crimsonwave Temple in value.

“Seniors.” Ning waved his finger, causing a series of runes to fly out. The many runes listed the various materials needed for Ning to train in the second and third levels of the [Sword Dao Body], the protective divine ability Ning had acquired from the deceased Sword Hegemon. There were four levels to this divine ability, and once reached it would allow Ning’s body to become comparable to the best Eternal treasures.

“Seniors, take a look at these materials. How much fruit do I need to give up for them?” Ning asked.

“Eh?” The three Hegemons and three leading Emperors all stared at the list, as did some of the other Eternal Emperors behind them who had yet

to even speak.

“Hm. I’ll only need sixty of the coldflame cauldron fruits for this,” Hegemon Netherlily said.

“I’ll only need forty-five of the same.” Emperor Goldisle of the Dao Alliance smiled. The three mighty Hegemons and the other Emperors instantly looked at him in irritation. The items which Ning had requested were all extraordinary; as they saw it, at least fifty coldflame cauldron fruits would be necessary.

“Emperor Goldisle, you are going a bit too far. Yes, your Dao Alliance has many treasures, but how can you give such a low offer?” Emperor Islehide frowned.

“How are we even supposed to compete if you are going to act like this?” Hegemon Windrain complained in a rumbling voice as well.

“Haha...” Emperor Goldisle laughed loudly. “We agreed early on that we’d compete fairly with each other. I’m doing just that.”

Ning gawked at the sight. He also noticed that although Crimsonwave Temple had produced nine types of fruit, all of the Emperors were focused on the ninth fruit, the coldflame cauldron fruits. This made Ning realize just how especially attractive these particular fruits were.

“Seniors, I’ve harvested eight types of fruit on this trip,” Ning said. “I’m willing to use the ‘purepeace fruit’ to trade for the materials I just requested. Might I ask how many are necessary?”

The purepeace fruit ripened every 30,000 chaos cycles. Ning had 108,000 of them!

Chapter 3: Entering the Dao Alliance's Palace of Immortals

“Purepeace fruit?” The three Hegemons and three Eternal Emperors exchanged glances. Although all nine of the types of fruit in Crimsonwave Temple were valuable, there were still differences between them.

The purepeace fruits, for example, ripened every 30,000 chaos cycles. There were 108,000 of them in each harvest. They were fairly numerous, and so the Flamedragon Realmverse's six major powers were still able to acquire it through other channels. As a result, they weren't all that desperate to acquire it. The coldflame cauldron fruits, however, only ripened once every 100,000 chaos cycles... and each time, only 300 were available during each harvest. As a result, people who acquired them would usually keep and use them for themselves! Very few were willing to trade them away, making them quite a hot commodity.

“For the materials you need? 80,000 of the purepeace fruits will do,” Emperor Goldisle said with a chuckle. “These things are still quite rare. They have their uses.”

The three Hegemons, Emperor Severfive, and Emperor Islehide were silent. Seeing this, Ji Ning understood that Emperor Goldisle had offered him quite a decent price.

“Alright.” Ning revealed a smile. “Then I'll give 80,000 of the purepeace fruits to Emperor Goldisle. Seniors, there are other treasures I need as well.”

Another block of text appeared in midair. This list included the materials needed to train in the first two stages of the secret art which the Sword Hegemon had provided to Ning, the [Grand Diffraction Sword] technique. To Ning, although a protective divine ability was very important, a strong secret art was even more important. Ning had already pretty much squeezed as much power as he could out of the nine novessence arts; by the time he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, they simply wouldn't be able to keep up.

The [Grand Diffraction Sword] consisted of three stages. The cost to fully master it would place a heavy burden upon even Hegemons; Ning felt that he probably didn't have enough fruit.

In addition, to master all three stages, one had to have reached an extremely high level of skill in the Dao of the Sword. Most likely, one would have to reach a level comparable to that of the deceased Sword Hegemon first. Thus, the first two stages were more than enough for Ning for now.

“Oh?”

“These materials...”

The three Hegemons and three Emperors all hesitated.

“Give me all 300 of the coldflame cauldron fruits and I'll help you collect them,” Emperor Islehide said in a low voice.

“Emperor Islehide is able to acquire all these items? Impressive!” Hegemon Netherlily laughed softly. “298 coldflame cauldron fruits, my young friend Darknorth, and I'll help you collect them.”

“Seniors, I'm willing to use these types of fruit to trade for them instead.” As Ning spoke, he caused seven different types of fruit to appear before him. These were the fruits corresponding to the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh command talismans.

“Clever.”

“What a clever boy.” The three Hegemons and the three Emperors all laughed. They could tell that Ning realized how enticing the coldflame cauldron fruits were to them and thus wasn't in a rush to sell them off.

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After extensive negotiations the Dao Alliance, the Brightshore Kingdom, the Aberrants, and the Aeonians jointly produced the materials necessary, taking away more than half of Ning's fruits in recompense.

Now, all Ning had were:

300 of the coldflame cauldron fruits from the ninth talisman;

28,000 of the purepeace fruits from the first talisman; 230 of the golden sandsifter fruits from the seventh talisman;

310 of the darkheaven yin-fruits from the sixth talisman.

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“Seniors, I’ve pretty much listed all the treasures I need,” Ning said. “I plan on paying a visit to the Palace of Immortals to see what they have in their treasury.”

“Haha, our treasury in the Palace of Immortals has everything within it. The Dao Alliance definitely has more treasures than anyone else,” Emperor Goldisle said with a smile.

“You aren’t going to trade anything else?”

“Darknorth, my young friend...”

The three Hegemons, Emperor Severfive, and Emperor Islehide were all startled. Ning was going to stop trading and instead go straight to the Palace of Immortals of the Dao Alliance? It must be remembered that thus far, he hadn’t produced a single one of the coldflame cauldron fruits, the most valuable of the nine fruits!

“Darknorth.” Hegemon Brightshore looked towards Ning.

Ning hurriedly explained, “Hegemon... seniors... my lifeblood weapons need to grow and to consume more materials, but I don’t know exactly what they need. That’s why I wish to go to the Palace of Immortals, so that I can test out the various materials! Once I’ve selected the materials I need, I’ll naturally notify all of you and allow the auction to proceed fairly.”

“Lifeblood weapons?” All of them now understood, as they had lifeblood weapons as well.

“No point wasting time. Come, let’s go to my Palace of Immortals right away,” Emperor Goldisle said with a smile. He then glanced at the others. “Hegemons, Emperors, you can come along with us... the Palace of Immortals will treat you with the utmost of courtesy.”

“We wouldn’t dare enter the Palace of Immortals.”

“We’ll wait outside of it.”

“Let’s go.”

The various figures immediately began to depart.

“Darknorth, follow me.” Emperor Goldisle smiled as he sent a spatial bubble out to cover Ning, then tore through space and departed with Ning in tow.

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The Palace of Immortals was an incomparably mysterious place. Ning had heard of it long ago, but he had never seen it.

“Here we are, Darknorth.” Emperor Goldisle’s voice rang out. Ning stared towards the front, stunned. In front of him was an absolutely enormous group of palaces that hung in the middle of space, radiating blinding light and a mighty aura. The radiance was so dazzling that Ning was truly dazed by it, while the power contained within the aura caused Ning’s heart to tremble.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. One figure after another appeared next to Ning. They were Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, Hegemon Netherlily, Emperor Severfive, and Emperor Islehide, as well as the subordinates they had brought with them. Ninedust and Winesage had been brought over as well.

“Darknorth.” Ninedust’s voice rang out within Ning’s ears.

“Ninedust.” Ning glanced at Ninedust.

“I’m embarrassed to say this, but...” Ninedust revealed an awkward look. “The Hegemon instructed me to ask you to at least sell some of the coldflame cauldron fruit to us Ancient cultivators.”

Ning revealed a smile as he sent mentally, “Got it. Don’t worry.” Ninedust was his brother; since he had made the request, Ning knew what to do.

“Darknorth.” Winesage sent a mental message as well, a similarly

awkward look on his face. “Darknorth, our Dark Kingdom is constantly beset by dangers. Just staying alive is difficult. I’d like to ask you to sell some of those coldflame cauldron fruits to the Dark Kingdom.”

“So long as the Dark Kingdom has the items I need, that won’t be a problem,” Ning replied.

Hegemon Brightshore looked at Ning as well. “Darknorth.”

“Don’t worry, Hegemon. I know what to do,” Ning replied.

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Favors and friendships were important, but being as fair and even-handed as possible was just as important, as was growing more powerful.

“Let me lead you inside, Darknorth.” Emperor Goldisle guided Ning in, with Ning staring everywhere in curiosity as they flew into the Palace of Immortals.

None of the Hegemons or Emperors present were worried that the Dao Alliance would play a dirty trick like killing Ning to steal his treasures.

First of all, although these fruits were rare they weren’t so important as to cause Hegemons or the Dao Alliance to not care about face. Only something as valuable as Crimsonwave Temple itself could possibly do that.

Secondly, only Daolords could harvest the fruits that ripened every few tens of thousands of chaos cycles from Crimsonwave Temple! If the Hegemons or the Dao Alliance dared to murder Ning, which Daolords in the future would be willing to take on the risk of helping them go harvest fruit?

Lastly, these things were a gift from Emperor Waveshift to his homeland. It was also a way to help his homeland temper its Daolords! If the Hegemons or the Dao Alliance dared to act rashly and angered Emperor Waveshift through their actions, Emperor Waveshift could very well take the entire temple back and ensure they would gain nothing at all in the future.

For all of these reasons, everyone knew that everyone else would play by the rules.

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The insides of the Palace of Immortals were absolutely lovely. The light of formations glimmered everywhere, while their aura was so mighty as to ensure that even Hegemons wouldn't dare to trespass within.

"Treasures of the Flamedragon Realmverse aside, the treasury of the Palace of Immortals has collected many treasures from other realmverses as well," Emperor Goldisle said with a smile. "It's hard to even count how many treasures we have. Choose whatever you like, Darknorth. We'll give you what you need for those fruits."

"Understood." Ning nodded.

"So this is Daolord Darknorth?" A deep voice boomed out from afar as a black-robed, black-haired old man walked towards them across the celestial pathways.

Emperor Goldisle made the introductions: "Darknorth, this is Emperor Blackcloud! The two of us jointly administer the Palace of Immortals for the Dao Alliance."

Ning was secretly speechless. So it was these two Emperors who were in control of the Palace of Immortals? Perhaps they were a bit weaker than the Hegemons, but they were actually even more influential.

"Daolord Darknorth, you've only trained for such a short period of time but have reached such incredible heights in power. Impressive." Emperor Blackcloud smiled. "Goldisle and I shall open the treasury for you to peruse as you please."

"Sorry for the trouble, seniors," Ning said modestly.

While chatting, these two leaders of the Dao Alliance led Ning to the location of the treasury.

"Open." Emperor Blackcloud waved a finger.

Rumble...

The white stone door in front of him began to split apart, revealing a dark passageway inside.

“The treasury is an important place, and so this passageway is filled with many barriers and wards. Not even Hegemons would dare to trespass here,” Emperor Blackcloud said smugly.

“Come, Darknorth.” Emperor Goldisle led the way, with Ning following from behind. In truth, the reason why they dared to open up the treasury like this for Ning was because Ning was weak; if a Hegemon had actually come here, there was no way they would’ve dared to let the Hegemon actually enter the treasury.

Chapter 4: Treasures the Northbow Swords Need

Ji Ning followed Emperor Goldisle and Emperor Blackcloud through the dark passageway. After walking for a short while, he finally saw yet another stone door.

“Open,” Emperor Blackcloud command. The stone door instantly sank downwards, revealing the vast treasury behind it.

“Wow.” Ning felt dizzy when he saw what was behind the stone door. He was able to sense many varied auras, some brutal, some cold, some stately... countless treasures were hanging there, so numerous that at a glance Ning was able to see tens of millions of treasures just with the naked eye alone.

“All treasures stored within our treasury are quite extraordinary.” Emperor Goldisle smiled. “Many treasures here are one-of-a-kind! But of course, there are also some that are quite numerous, in which case we’ll just put a single sample item here.”

“Seniors,” Ning said hurriedly, “My lifeblood weapons need to personally touch the treasures in order to sense if they can make use of them or not.”

“Just touching is fine,” Emperor Goldisle said solemnly, “But don’t damage anything. Some of the treasures here are incredibly valuable.”

“Please don’t worry. My lifeblood weapons wouldn’t dare,” Ning said.

The nearby Emperor Blackcloud laughed. “Go, then. Inspect them to your heart’s content.”

Ning nodded. “Come out,” Ning willed mentally. Swish! Swish! Swish! All six Northbow swords flew out from their scabbards, and as they did so an adorable child appeared from each of them.

“Master! Master!” All six children began to call out repeatedly.

“Listen up. This treasury is filled with countless treasures. You can touch them to sense which are of use to you,” Ning said, “But remember, you

absolutely must not damage any of them, nor are you allowed to absorb any of them. After the inspection is complete, with any luck, I'll be able to give you some treasures to absorb."

"Alright."

"Haha, don't worry."

"Leave it to us!" All six Northbow sword-spirits were quite excited.

"Go." Ning immediately sent them flying into the skies towards the various treasures, which they began to scan.

This vast treasury was filled with long stone tables that were covered with countless treasures. There were also incredibly long twelve-layered treasure shelves, with each layer filled with many treasures. The ones placed on the shelves were clearly less valuable! There were also individual stone daises that held only a single treasure each.

This place had all sorts of weapons, even Universe weapons! There were all sorts of marvelous treasures here, including many strange curios that had been collected from the Terror Starsea...

.....

Time slowly passed on, one minute at a time. Ning continued to furiously send his six Northbow swords flying everywhere, touching the various treasures. After roughly the time needed to boil a kettle of tea...

"Master! Master! I can sense that if I ate this flower, it would be of big use to me," Northbow Five called out spiritually to Ning.

Ning's eyes lit up as he immediately looked towards the sword. This was a semi-ethereal flower that was surrounded by a faint gray aura. There was a jade slip next to it that introduced it as the 'shadowless six-thief flower'. It was capable of hiding itself amongst other objects, making it extremely difficult to find. It was an incomparably marvelous item.

"How many of those can you eat?" Ning asked spiritually.

"I'm not sure. At least ten thousand," Northbow Five replied.

"Got it." Ning nodded, silently memorizing this flower. He then

continued to search for other treasures. This treasury most likely had copies of almost all of the decent treasures located within the Flamedragon Realmverse! When would he ever have another chance like this to just scan them as he pleased? Even if he wasn't able to acquire what he needed due to not having enough fruit, he could at least memorize them for future collection.

.....

Outside the Palace of Immortals. Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, Hegemon Netherlily, Emperor Severfive, and Emperor Islehide continued to wait patiently alongside their retainers.

"Brightshore," Hegemon Windrain said hurriedly, "The Dao Alliance wouldn't be playing a trick on our young friend Darknorth, would they? If he ends up trading with them without giving us a chance..."

"Agreed. Brightshore..." Emperor Islehide said hurriedly, "Darknorth belongs to your Brightshore Kingdom."

"Don't worry." Hegemon Brightshore smiled. "I can reach out to Darknorth at any time! He's currently within the treasury of the Palace of Immortals, scanning the countless treasures there. This process will take some time, so don't be impatient. Once he knows which treasures he needs, he'll publicly announce it."

"Good. At least we can compete fairly," Emperor Severfive said. All of them were truly the most elite figures of the Endless Territories, but this competition over the coldflame cauldron fruits still made them nervous.

There was a rough, accepted 'value' to these fruits, but they were simply never available for sale. Very, very few were willing to sell these fruits, which was why in normal times the Hegemons were willing to pay multiples of the 'accepted' value for the few coldflame cauldron fruits which appeared from time to time! Now that Crimsonwave Temple was going to be located within the Endless Territories indefinitely, they'd be able to harvest 300 of the fruits every 100,000 chaos cycles. This was why they hadn't offered excessively high prices in their negotiations with Ning.

However... they also understood that the future couldn't be predicted.

Who knew when Emperor Waveshift would end up taking the temple away again?

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Within the treasury of the Palace of Immortals of the Dao Alliance.

Ning continued to control his six Northbow swords, sending them flying about like streaks of light towards various treasures, then gently brushing against them.

“Master! Master! I can sense that this stone is going to help me out a lot!” Northbow Three called out as well. Ning immediately memorized the stone in question.

By the time he had nearly finished a complete scan of all the treasures within the treasury, he had already discovered a total of twelve treasures that would be of use to his Northbow swords! However, the Northbow swords would devour absolutely enormous amounts of material as they grew. Ning worried as to whether or not this would even be enough.

Finally, after roughly ten hours of scanning, Ning had finished his first review of all the treasures.

“How’d it go?” Emperor Goldisle and Emperor Blackcloud both looked at Ning.

“There really are quite a few treasures that are useful to my lifeblood weapons,” Ning said.

“Which treasures do you need? Go ahead and tell us and we’ll try to help you collect them as best we can,” Emperor Goldisle said.

“I should probably say it outside,” Ning replied hurriedly. “The Hegemon reminded me long ago that we have to keep things fair.”

“Oh. Right, right. Fair.” Emperor Blackcloud and Emperor Goldisle exchanged a glance, rather resigned. In the end, Ning belonged to the Brightshore Kingdom, making Hegemon Brightshore’s instructions quite effective.

Emperor Blackcloud and Emperor Goldisle didn’t really worry too much.

Given how filthy rich the Dao Alliance was, they were quite confident in their chances.

“Let’s go.” Emperor Blackcloud and Emperor Goldisle led Ning in departing from the treasury.

.....

Outside the Palace of Immortals. Ji Ning, Emperor Blackcloud, and Emperor Goldisle flew out at the same time.

“There they are.” The three Hegemons, Emperor Severfive, Emperor Islehide, and the various retainers all looked towards Ning, their eyes lighting up.

The time for the final negotiations over the coldflame cauldron fruits had come.

“Darknorth, did you find any suitable treasures?” Hegemon Brightshore asked.

“I found twelve,” Ning said. The Hegemons and Emperors were all rather startled by this answer. Twelve? It seemed likely that everyone would be able to provide Ning with something he needed.

“The first is known as the ‘shadowless six-thief flowers’,” Ning said. “I need at least ten thousand of them.”

“The shadowless six-thief flowers?”

“Over ten thousand?”

“But...”

The three Hegemons and the various Emperors exchanged glances, all feeling rather resigned.

“What is it?” Ning was puzzled.

“Darknorth, even if we scraped up all of the shadowless six-thief flowers that the Flamedragon Realmverse has accumulated over the countless years of its existence, we would probably only be able to find a few hundred of them,” Hegemon Brightshore said.

Emperor Goldisle nodded as well. “The shadowless six-thief flowers are invisible, hidden throughout the cosmos. They are extremely hard to find. Although they aren’t that useful, they really are quite rare.”

Ning felt quite helpless upon hearing this. If the Northbow swords were to grow, they needed materials in sufficiently large quantities. For example, they had absorbed a terrifying amount of that golden sand! Based on what the Northbow sword-spirit had predicted, he would need at least ten thousand of those flowers, but it seemed as though Ning wouldn’t even be able to acquire a tenth of that. Such a small amount would be of limited benefit.

“The second type of treasure is known as the flamebearer tathata-metal,” Ning said. “I’ll need a mountain of it, a mountain which is roughly thirty thousand meters tall.”

“Thirty thousand meters tall?” The Hegemons and Emperors sighed again.

“You are asking for too much. Flamebearer tathata-metal is used in palm-sized chunks for forging treasures. You want a mountain of it?” Emperor Goldisle shook his head. “There’s no way to get that much in the Flamedragon Realmverse. If the Dao Alliance was willing to pay incredible prices to have other realmverses help out and deliver them, we might be able to do it... but the coldflame cauldron fruits in your possession aren’t nearly enough to trade for a mountain of the tathata-metal.”

Chapter 5: Stone Hellephant Wall

Ji Ning was speechless. It was clear that everyone wanted his coldflame cauldron fruits, but the first two items he had requested, the ‘Six Bandits Shadowless Flowers’ and the ‘flamebearer tathata-metal’, weren’t available in the quantities he needed in the Endless Territories.

What Ning didn’t fully understand was that the Northbow swords needed balance in order to grow to their maximum potential. They had absorbed such an enormous amount of that golden sand that they would need similarly prodigious amounts of other materials to gain that balance and reach their apex.

“You have twelve types of treasures you can use, right?” Emperor Islehide said, “Keep talking. We might be able to provide you with the other treasures.”

“Alright.” Ning had no choice but to continue with his requests. “The third type of treasure is known as astral forgestones. I need a three thousand meter mountain of it.”

“Don’t have it.”

“Don’t have enough.”

“Where would you even find that many astral forgestones?”

The Hegemons and Emperors, along with their retainers, all shook their heads. Most of the retainers were also Eternal Emperors and as such had seen many things.

Helpless, Ning had no choice but to continue listing the things he needed. The fourth type, the fifth type, the sixth type... nothing, nothing, nothing!

Ning simply needed too much; there was no way to acquire that much at all. The more valuable an item, the rarer it was, after all. When Ning had visited that alternate universe and had discovered that vast mountain of darkspace flamestone, it had been a momentous find, not because of how valuable the stone itself was, but because of how utterly enormous that

mountain had been.

The same principle applied here. The various treasures Ning sought were far more valuable than darkspace flamestone, and he needed an enormous amount of them; there was just no way to acquire that much!

“The eighth type is known as the frozen ninesong pith,” Ning said. “I’ll need a lake of it that’s three hundred meters long, wide, and deep.” The numbers he listed out were still quite shocking.

“Three hundred coldflame cauldron fruits,” Emperor Severfive immediately called out.

“Two hundred and ninety,” Emperor Goldisle said.

“Two hundred!” Emperor Islehide growled.

“A hundred and ninety,” Hegemon Brightshore said.

Ning had been feeling increasingly despondent. Now, he stared blankly as the Eternal Emperors furiously bid down the price. Was this frozen ninesong pith a very common item?

Emperor Goldisle interjected, “Gentlemen, I think we should stop fighting against each other as there will be no ‘winner’. Since he’s asking for frozen ninesong pith, I’m sure that all of us will be able to provide it in enormous amounts. How about we split it evenly? Darknorth, give us a hundred and fifty coldflame cauldron fruits, a hundred and fifty golden sandsifter fruits, and a hundred and fifty darkheaven yin-fruits. All six of us will jointly procure the necessary frozen ninesong pith you need! We’ll give you double what you ask for; a lake of it that’s six hundred meters wide, long, and deep!”

“Agreed.” The others all nodded after a brief pause. They understood and agreed that no one would really ‘win’ this auction.

“What’s going on?” Ning asked.

“Long ago, our Flamedragon Realmverse discovered a river that swirled around a strange star,” Emperor Goldisle explained. “This river is roughly a hundred thousand kilometers long and hundreds of kilometers wide...

and it was filled with frozen ninesong pith. As a result, all six of us have large stocks of it.”

Ning was stunned. A river that was a hundred thousand kilometers long and hundreds of kilometers wide? The tiny ‘lake’ he needed was in comparison just a tiny fraction!

“We can give you six hundred meters of it. If you need more, we can easily give you a bit more,” Emperor Goldisle said. They really didn’t care about the frozen ninesong pith that much.

“Go ahead and continue listing what you need,” Emperor Islehide said. “We might have it.”

“Alright.” Ning smiled as he continued to list the items he needed. The ninth, the tenth, the eleventh... the twelfth.

“The twelfth is known as deepfire blackstone. I need a mountain-sized pile roughly three hundred thousand meters tall.” Ning looked eagerly at the three Hegemons and the various Hegemons. Thus far, the only treasure they were able to provide had been was still just the frozen ninesong pith. The other treasures simply weren’t available.

“Three hundred thousand meters?”

“He’s pretty crazy.”

“Are you sure your lifeblood weapons can swallow that much?” The various Emperors present couldn’t help but mutter amongst themselves.

They knew that the deepfire blackstone was the last of the twelve types of treasures Ning needed, but the amount was just staggering.

“Can’t do it. Deepfire blackstone isn’t all that useful; it’s mainly used for smelting a few treasures. However, the Endless Territories only has perhaps a three thousand meter mountain of it.” Emperor Goldisle shook his head. “You want a three hundred thousand meter mountain. The difference is just too great.”

Three thousand. Three hundred thousand. This was a hundredfold difference in height, and a millionfold difference in total mass!

“Ugh.” Ning shook his head. Three thousand meters? Even if he gained all of it, it probably wouldn’t be all that beneficial to his Northbow swords.

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After all was said and done, he had acquired all of the materials he needed for the second and third stages of his [Swordbody] divine ability as well as the first two stages of the Sword Hegemon’s secret art, [Grand Diffraction Sword]. Alas, he had only acquired the frozen ninesong pith for his Northbow swords.

“I guess that’s that.” Ning was out of options. He had already negotiated with the six most powerful organizations in all the Endless Territories, but had only been able to acquire one of the treasures he needed. One could imagine how difficult it would be for his Northbow swords to grow!

“Darknorth, my young friend,” a voice suddenly called out.

“Eh?” Ning glanced over, as did the three Hegemons and the Eternal Emperors. The speaker was an ordinary-looking horned youth who stood behind Hegemon Brightshore. When the horned youth spoke his aura immediately changed, exploding in might and reaching an utterly astonishing level. The terrifying, awe-inspiring aura around him was definitely that of a Hegemon.

“A Hegemon?” Ning, Ninedust, and Winesage were all stunned.

“Eh?” The other Eternal Emperors of the Flamedragon Realmverse were all astonished as well. Everyone knew that the Flamedragon Realmverse only had three almighty Hegemons within it. Where did this one come from?

The horned youth glanced at the assembled Emperors of the Flamedragon Realmverse, then explained, “My name is Welkin. I’ve wandered through the Great Dark and visited many realmverses, and I ended up slumbering within the Flamedragon Realmverse for a period of time due to having sustained a few injuries. The only reason I woke up was because of Crimsonwave Temple’s emergence.”

“Brother Welkin was planning to leave secretly,” Hegemon Brightshore

said. “It was Crimsonwave Temple that drew him out of hiding.”

“Hegemon Welkin? So you are Welkin?” Hegemon Netherlily smiled. “I’ve heard of your illustrious name long ago, but I never had the chance to meet you.”

“Ah, Welkin!” Hegemon Windrain revealed a smile as well.

All Hegemons naturally felt respect for their peers. They all stood at the very peak of power amongst Eternal Emperors! But of course, those who were lucky enough to take control over an alternate universe and become known as Otherverse Lords were somewhat more powerful than even Hegemons in power.

A good example was the alternate universe Ning had visited. The lord of the Church of Annihilation hadn’t been at the Hegemon level; he had merely been comparable to the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. After a stroke of tremendous fortune, he had ended up in control of that otherverse and as a result become an Otherverse Lord, resulting in his status and his power skyrocketing.

“I didn’t want to get involved in this,” Hegemon Welkin said with a smile, “But since our young friend Darknorth spoke of deepfire blackstone... I’m actually able to help you out here.”

“Ah!” Ning revealed a look of delight.

“Give me a hundred coldflame cauldron fruits, and I’ll give you plenty of deepfire blackstone ore,” Hegemon Welkin said. “I’m not asking for much.”

The other three Hegemons and other Eternal Emperors all felt rather resigned. They simply weren’t able to provide enough of the deepfire blackstone! Hegemon Welkin, however, was different; he was a wanderer who had visited many places and who knew much more than them. They weren’t surprised by the fact that he was able to provide this much deepfire blackstone.

“Agreed.” Ning nodded. “A hundred coldflame cauldron fruits it is.” Hegemon Welkin was the only person who could provide the ore in

question. Even if he had requested all of the remaining fruits, Ning would've been in a difficult position to bargain from. The Hegemon was being quite courteous by only requesting a hundred.

"Mm. The deepspace blackstone can be found in a place known as the Stone Hellephant Wall. This is a strange, curious place that I stumbled upon while I was travelling to your Flamedragon Realmverse, and it's quite close by it. But of course, if I didn't guide the way you'd never be able to find it." Hegemon Welkin smiled. "I'll personally escort you there. It'll take roughly nine years."

"You aren't playing a trick on Darknorth, are you?" Emperor Goldisle frowned.

"I'll naturally swear a lifeblood oath," Hegemon Welkin said. Upon hearing this, the other Eternal Emperors fell silent.

Ning began to feel a sense of eagerness in his heart. The 'Stone Hellephant Wall', eh?

Chapter 6: Arrangements

A full two years went by as the six major powers of the Endless Territories gathered the various treasures which Ji Ning needed, at which point in time Ning gave them the agreed-upon fruits. This was actually quite fast, given how vast the Endless Territories were. There were quite a few treasures which the three Hegemons and the various Eternal Emperors didn't actually have on hand, with the collection process naturally taking some time.

After acquiring all of the materials needed, Ning and Ninedust accompanied Hegemon Welkin on the journey.

Whoosh. Ning, Ninedust, and Hegemon Welkin were seated within a dazzling deep-blue vessel that was flying through the darkness of space at high speeds.

"Senior Welkin." Ning glanced outside. They were now quite close to the Badlands Territory. "Can we halt for now?"

"Hm?" Hegemon Welkin immediately brought the vessel to a halt.

"I have a few things to take care of," Ning said. "After going to this Stone Hellephant Wall and acquiring enough of the deepfire blackstone, Ninedust and I will continue our adventures. I need to make some arrangements for my retainers and take care of some things."

Ninedust had only recently become a Daolord of the Fourth Step. Although he had used a Voidsea Jadeseal, he still wasn't confident in his Daomerge chances and thus had to continue his adventures.

As for Ning himself, he wanted to acquire a treasure that was comparable to Crimsonwave Temple in value, so that he would be able to request an Autarch to revive Yu Wei. It must be remembered that Crimsonwave Temple was worth more than the total networth of an average Hegemon. If he wanted to acquire something like that... where else but through adventure would this be possible?

"Alright." Hegemon Welkin nodded.

Ning took a single step out of the flying vessel and appeared in the empty space outside. He waved his hand. Whoosh. Four figures immediately appeared next to him. These were Su Youji, Pillsaint, Daolord Naia, and Daolord Bruteflame. The four retainers looked at Ning, then called out respectfully, “Master.”

Ning looked at them, a rather complex look on his face. He said with a sigh, “You have all accompanied me for many years now. Youji, you started following me when I was an Elder God. Pillsaint, we met when we were World Gods in the Brightshore Kingdom...”

“Master.” Su Youji couldn’t help but interject, “Why are you saying...”

“Mm. I can sense that the places I am going to go visit are far too dangerous for you,” Ning said. “That last trip to the Terror Starsea was a good example, as was our visit to the Waveshift Realm. Both places were incredibly dangerous. If I survived them, you would be fine, but if I didn’t then you probably would’ve all died there.”

Su Youji and Pillsaint seemed to want to say something. Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteflame exchanged glances.

“Pillsaint, for example, has chosen the path of the Dao of Alchemy. There’s absolutely no need for him to go out adventuring,” Ning said with a smile. “He should find a good place to peacefully train in alchemy. And you, Youji... by following me like this you yourself aren’t adventuring at all.”

“As a result...” Ning looked at the four of them. “The four of you should all go out adventuring. If you wish to speak to me, go to Vastheaven Palace. My avatar will be there permanently.”

“Oh, right. Take these treasures. You can consider them lifesavers.” Ning waved his hand, causing four gourds to fly out towards Su Youji and the others. Ning had won quite a bit from this trip to the Waveshift Realm. He had killed the Kingfreak, Sectlord Timedream, and quite a few second-tier Daolords... and had also gained many treasures from Winesage. As a result, he had a prodigious number of treasures on hand!

Ning gave Su Youji the best treasures and Pillsaint the second-best

treasures, with Daolord Bruteflame and Daolord Naia gaining the least. There was a difference in how much he cared about them, after all.

“Master.” Su Youji and Pillsaint were rather unwilling to part from him, while Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteflame were rather calm. The latter two had been alive for extremely long and had experienced many things.

“Go,” Ning instructed.

Su Youji, Pillsaint, Naia, and Bruteflame traded glances. In the end, they had no choice but to leave. They too understood that this was the best choice for them.

“Pillsaint, where shall you go?” Su Youji asked.

“I’m going to Vastheaven Palace,” Pillsaint said. “All I need is a place to concoct pills. Since our master’s avatar will be in Vastheaven Palace, that’s the best place for me.”

“Mm. I’ll go there as well.” Su Youji nodded. Avatars shared the same thoughts and memories as true bodies, after all. Su Youji wanted to stay a bit closer to Ning if possible.

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Ning watched as Su Youji, Pillsaint, and the others left. With them gone, he relaxed slightly. Bidding them farewell was the most responsible thing he could do for them.

Whoosh. Ning waved his finger, causing a blurry, rainbow spacetime tunnel to instantly appear in front of him. Ning took a single step into the tunnel, immediately vanishing.

“Eh?” Ninedust, still seated within the vessel, glanced outside in surprise. Just a few moments ago, he had seen Ning bidding his four retainers farewell. Now, Ning had suddenly entered a spacetime tunnel and vanished. “Where’d he go?” Ninedust said with some surprise.

“Off to take care of some random tasks, no doubt.” Hegemon Welkin was quite calm. “My guess is that Darknorth’s home is within the Badlands Territory, as we’re fairly close to it. Given his ability to transcend

spacetime, he should be able to reach that territory in just a few seconds.”

“Right.” Ninedust nodded. A few moments later, a rather mixed look appeared on his face as he murmured softly, “At least Darknorth has random tasks he needs to take care of and a beloved Dao-companion he has to revive. I... don’t seem to have any family, nor do I have a Dao-companion.”

Ancient cultivators did not have parents, as they were born from the primordial chaos itself.

A short while later... whoosh. A spacetime tunnel appeared, with a white-robed youth bearing a golden sheath on his back stepping out of it.

“There you are.” Ninedust cast away his pensive thoughts and called out towards Ning.

“Mm.” Ning nodded. Just now, he had paid a quick visit to his Primaltwin in the Badlands Territory. He had handed many of the treasures he had acquired within the Waveshift Realm over to his Primaltwin, as many of them were now of no use to Ning but of tremendous use to the Three Realms. There were many valuable pills, including the ‘Soleheart World Pill’ that could allow someone to forcibly break through to the World level. There were even Pseudo Samsara Pills that could allow someone to break through to become Samsara Daolords! To truly powerful Daolords like him, these pills truly were nothing.

Given Ning’s current status, for him to forcibly uplift a number of World-level cultivators was quite an easy task. However, he wouldn’t do so without cause. Only those who broke through on their own with hard work would be able to walk farther along their chosen paths. Those who made their breakthroughs via relying on Pseudo Samsara Pills to become Samsara Daolords were virtually guaranteed to remain Daolords of the First Step.

“Sorry to have troubled you.” Ning looked at Hegemon Welkin. “I’ve finished everything I need to do. I can now go out with some peace of mind.”

“I really envy youngsters like you.” Hegemon Welkin sighed. “Long, long

ago, when I was still very weak, I had some friends who accompanied me as well. However... all of them died. None of them were able to succeed in their Daomerge. They died far, far too long ago... and I'm the only one left. That's why I've gone out wandering through various realmverse and otherverses. Only by seeing many new places do I feel that life has any meaning."

Ning and Ninedust exchanged a glance. Indeed... in life, one needed to have goals. Otherwise, eternal loneliness would be a form of torment.

Hegemon Brightshore, for example, was completely focused on his imperial clan and his descendants. Although it was tiring work, it gave him something to do. As for Samsara Daolords... they focused on adventuring and the Daomerge.

To Eternal Emperors, their endless lifespans were a source of frustration. This was why many of them, such as Emperor Mirrorsnow and Emperor Heartsword, had ended up leaving and going off wandering. Their curiosity towards what else lay within the Chaosverse was what sustained them and gave them energy.

"Actually... we Daolords envy you as well," Ning said.

"Right. Even in my dreams I fantasize about succeeding in my Daomerge and becoming a Hegemon," Ninedust said.

"Hahaha..." Hegemon Welkin laughed loudly. "Every single stage of cultivation has its own sights to enjoy. Life as a Samsara Daolord is one of the most glorious, exciting stages of them all. Work hard, youngsters. If you can break through to become Hegemons, we might meet again in the future."

"Might meet again in the future?" Ning was puzzled.

"After I send you off to the Stone Hellephant Wall, I'll leave and continue my wanderings," Hegemon Welkin said. "Wandering through the Chaosverse and seeing everything there is to see... to me, that's the most interesting thing there is. It'll be a long, long time before I come back to the Flamedragon Realmverse. If you don't become Hegemons, it's unlikely that we'll meet again."

“Right.” Ning and Ninedust both nodded. To someone who was as infinitely long-lived as Hegemon Welkin, 108,000 chaos cycles really was a short period of time.

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Hegemon Welkin once more took control over the flying vessel, sending it tearing through spacetime. As for Ning, he secluded himself within his own estate-world and began to train once more. It would take nine years to reach the Stone Hellephant Wall, after all. This would be more than enough time for him to grow significantly more powerful yet again!

Chapter 7: The Stone Wall in the Darkness

Within the estate-world.

“Open.” Ji Ning was standing at the peak of a mountain, staring down at the vast wilderness before him. He waved his finger, and with a boom an invisible surge of pressure slammed down upon the wilderness, causing an enormous indentation to appear on the ground. The indentation was nine hundred meters deep! Ning then reached out with his right hand, causing a small little black gourd to appear. He pulled out the stopper, causing a stream of deep blue water to flow out from the gourd. The stream of water grew in size as it flew out until it became many meters thick, almost like a watery dragon as it soared out to fill the indentation.

Whooooosh. The liquid continuously poured out, quickly filling nearly half of the indentation. This was the frozen ninesong pith Ning had just recently acquired.

“Go ahead, children.” Ning smiled as the six Northbow swords on his back instantly flew out of the sheath, each one of them manifesting a child.

“Haha, frozen ninesong pith!”

“That’s the frozen ninesong pith.”

“There’s so much of it! We can eat as much as we want.” The six Northbow swords were all extremely excited. Each of them transformed to become nine hundred meters long, plunging themselves into the pool like sword-shaped mountains that then began to furiously devour the frozen ninesong pith.

Ning waved his hand, causing his temporal acceleration cabin to appear next to him. He entered the cabin, then began to train in the [Swordbody] divine ability. He now had all the materials he needed, but the actual training process was very slow because this sort of cultivation technique placed enormous burdens on his body. He had to take it slowly and allow the power to slowly seep through. However, at least these protective divine abilities didn’t require him to focus too much of his attention on it.

Thus, he was able to devote most of his time to meditating on his Omega Sword Dao and the [Heartsword] art.

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Nearly three months went past. Ning could sense that his lifeblood weapons had already finished evolving, and so he walked out of his temporal cabin.

“Northbow swords.” Ning looked at the six enormous mountain-sized Northbow swords, still stuck into that giant indentation. Their appearances had changed as well. They previously were a dazzling pure golden color, but now they had the color of blue gold. The surfaces of the swords were now very glossy, with the light of the sword being rather reserved. They looked almost like pure spring water.

“Come out.” Ning willed the six Northbow swords to fly out, and they quickly flew towards him while shrinking to their normal size. Five of the Northbow swords flew into his sheath, while the sixth landed in his hands.

“Let’s see just how they’ve changed after absorbing the frozen ninesong pith.” Ning immediately began to execute his sword-arts, causing sword-light to shine everywhere and transform the empty area around him into a realm of the sword. The aura of the Dao of the Sword pervaded every inch of the area as he began to execute the five stances of the Omega Sword Dao.

“Mm.” Ning revealed a look of delight. “The Northbow swords are now both fierce and flexible, making them of great use to my defensive sword-arts. Both the Yin-Yang stance and the Soleheart stance have improved significantly; I imagine that both of them are five times as powerful as previously.”

The Yin-Yang stance could be used to execute the Yin-Yang Sword Domain with all six swords, making it an excellent area defense.

The Soleheart stance was focused on single-target defense.

“If I was to fight against Winesage again, I could fight him head-on. My defensive sword-arts would be able to easily ablate and deflect his power.

At least I wouldn't be sent flying this time!" Ning revealed a look of delight. In a deadly situation, defensive sword-arts were even more important than offensive attacks. The power of your attacks would determine the fate of others, but the power of your defenses would determine the fate of yourself.

"We'll be reaching the Stone Hellephant Wall soon. By then they'll be able to absorb plenty of the deepfire blackstone, and my Northbow swords should only grow even more powerful." Ning grew increasingly eager to see what would happen.

The growth of any lifeblood weapon would be tied to the treasures they devoured. The majority of supreme Daolords all used lifeblood weapons, but very few of them would be able to acquire as many treasures as this!

Ning wasn't a good example; neither the sea of golden sand nor the lake of frozen ninesong pith were things which ordinary supreme Daolords were capable of acquiring. However, Eternal Emperors had very long lives, with Hegemons possessing tremendous power; as a result, their lifeblood weapons were usually very powerful. Daolord Dreamlore's bloodblade, for example, had once been a lifeblood weapon that had reached an incredible level of power. From a material level, it absolutely had the potential to become a Universe treasure... but alas, the Dao inside it was slightly lacking and thus it wasn't able to reach this level.

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Hegemon Welkin's flying vessel had long ago departed from the Flamedragon Realmverse and entered the endless Great Dark.

The Great Dark... there were no stars here, no light... nothing at all. There was nothing but darkness! Darkness, enough of it to cause even Eternal Emperors to feel despair.

In truth, the Great Dark did have some foreign objects floating about within it. Daolord Clevermind of the Ninedust Sect, for example, had seen those six great warhammers floating about within the Great Dark as he had travelled around its borders. This was why he had been lucky enough to acquire them. Thus, the Great Dark wasn't truly devoid of all things.

“Here we are.” Hegemon Welkin finally brought the flying vessel to a halt. It had indeed taken nine years.

“The two of you can come out now.” Hegemon Welkin glanced at the two estate-treasures next to him. Ning and Ninedust had both secreted themselves into their estate-worlds. With a giant booming sound, an invisible spatial wave slammed straight into the two estate-treasures, causing the estate-worlds to tremble. Soon, Ning and Ninedust both emerged.

“The two of you really do seize every moment,” Hegemon Welkin said with a laugh. “You’ve been furiously training for every day of the past nine years.”

“I gained quite a bit from my visit to Crimsonwave Temple. I naturally had to seize this chance to train,” Ninedust said hurriedly. He then looked at Ning. “Darknorth, you traded for quite a few treasures from the Hegemons and Eternal Emperors. You’ve probably grown quite a bit stronger as well.”

“I’m doing alright.” Ning nodded. He had only been able to train his body to make it comparable to a middle-grade Eternal treasure, primarily because the protective divine ability placed incredible demands and burdens on the body. He had to take it slow; if he did it too fast and tried to force things, his divine body would crumble and his truesoul would crumble with it. Thus, he had to train slowly even though he already had all the materials needed.

“We’re not too far away from the Flamedragon Realmverse,” Hegemon Welkin said. “The two of you should still be able to sense it.”

“We can.” Ning and Ninedust both nodded. Ning could sense exactly where his Primaltwin was.

“Darknorth, my young friend, your sword-arts have transcended spacetime. I brought you here to the Stone Hellephant Wall, but I think you should be able to slowly return under your own abilities. Given your power, you should be able to return within a thousand years,” Hegemon Welkin said.

“A minor matter.” Ning nodded. A thousand years was a very short period of time for supreme Daolords; he wouldn’t force Hegemon Welkin to wait by his side for a trifling matter like sending him home.

Whoosh. The flying vessel disappeared, causing the three of them to appear within the empty space of the Great Dark.

“There really is nothing but darkness here.” Ning scanned the area, only to see absolute darkness all around him. There was no light at all; only by using godsense was he able to ‘see’ the surrounding area, and there really was nothing whatsoever around him.

“Senior.” Ning couldn’t help but ask, “Factoring in my ability to transcend spacetime... if I were to go drifting through the Great Dark, would 100,000 chaos cycles be enough for me to reach the closest realmverse?”

“The realmverse closest to the Flamedragon Realmverse is known as the Multilight Realmverse. Although your ability to transcend spacetime is impressive, it will still take roughly a million chaos cycles before you get there,” Hegemon Welkin said.

Ning and Ninedust shared a glance. Yeah, forget that. Samsara Daolords could spend their entire lives travelling without making it to the Multilight Realmverse.

“Let’s go to the Stone Hellephant Wall,” Ninedust said immediately.

“The Stone Hellephant Wall is just up ahead. Follow me.” Hegemon Welkin emanated a bubble that encompassed both Ning and Ninedust, ‘carrying’ them with him as he flew forwards at high speed.

Whoosh. Hegemon Welkin was simply too fast, so fast that Ning and Ninedust both felt their hearts tremble. They were starting to truly understand how terrifyingly strong Hegemons were. Their speed alone ensured that supreme Daolords wouldn’t even have a chance to react before dying.

A few moments later, they had flown tens of billions of kilometers. “See that?” Hegemon Welkin pointed up ahead. “That right there is the Stone

Hellephant Wall.”

Ning looked towards the front. A colossal object was up ahead, hanging within the endless darkness. It emanated a natural but dim aura of light that was enough for supreme Daolords like Nine and Ninedust to make it out clearly.

The thing up ahead was roughly a million kilometers long and shaped like a giant elephant. Only, it had what looked like an incredibly sharp horn coming from its ‘head’. The entire thing was black... or perhaps an incredibly deep red!

“At first glance, it rather looks like a demonic elephant, doesn’t it?” Hegemon Welkin said, “But if you move closer, you’ll see that it is actually very, very thin.”

“Oh?” Ning and Ninedust hurriedly moved closer. Indeed, although this enormous thing was over a million kilometers long, it was merely a thousand kilometers thick. The thickness was very even.

“It... looks almost like a wall carving someone did,” Ninedust said.

“Right. It looks like a detached wall carving of an enormous, hellish elephant,” Hegemon Welkin said. “That’s why I named it the Stone Hellephant Wall. This thing has been floating in the Great Dark for an extremely long period of time, and the entire thing is composed of deepfire blackstone. I was overjoyed when I saw it and wanted to take it with me, but it was just too big. Some sort of invisible power made it so that I just couldn’t take it away by force. Your lifeblood weapons wish to absorb deepfire blackstone, right? Go ahead and let them absorb as much as they want from this enormous wall of deepfire blackstone. Now... we agreed on a hundred coldfire cauldron fruits. Go ahead and give them to me.”

Chapter 8: Mining

Ji Ning glanced at the enormous Stone Hellephant Wall. “Senior, please let me first see if they can even absorb it.”

“Go ahead.”

One of the Northbow swords flew out from the sheath on Ning’s back and stabbed straight towards the Stone Hellephant Wall. Crack! The Northbow sword didn’t damage the wall in the slightest, but as it hung there with the sword tip touching the wall, everyone present could see that a small ‘crater’ was slowly beginning to appear and expand at the point of contact.

“Master, this is deepfire blackstone. We can absorb it!” a child appeared on the surface of the Northbow sword and called out excitedly towards Ning.

Ning couldn’t help but reveal a smile. He turned his head to look at Hegemon Welkin. “Thank you, senior. Here are your hundred coldflame cauldron fruits.” Ning sent out a jade bottle with a hundred fruits within it.

Hegemon Welkin accepted it, scanned it with his godsense, then accepted it.

“You can just take your time absorbing the deepfire blackstone. I’m off.” Hegemon Welkin’s gaze turned towards the Northbow sword that had slowly plunged deep into the Stone Hellephant Wall; by now, quite a bit of the deepfire blackstone had disappeared from around it. “Even I am not able to take away this enormous chunk of deepfire blackstone, but your swords are able to absorb it... haha. Still, upgrading lifeblood weapons is an incredibly difficult process. Even if you can let them absorb an enormous amount of materials and upgrade them to their material limit, if you wish to transform them into Universe treasures then they will need quintessence cores that are at a similarly incredible level. I’ve reared lifeblood weapons of my own, but alas I haven’t been able to create any Universe treasures.”

Ning nodded upon hearing this. Creating a Universe treasure was no easy feat.

“To me, searching for an ownerless Universe treasure is a better use of my time,” Hegemon Welkin said. “There are still some who would be willing to acknowledge me as their master.”

“That, senior, is because you are a Hegemon!” The nearby Ninedust interjected, “It is normal for Universe treasures to be willing to submit themselves to Hegemons. Daolords like us though? Unless we stumble into some truly incredible luck, it’s almost impossible for us to be able to make Universe treasures submit to us.”

Ninedust was a good example. He was an exalted member of the Ancients and was a master in staff-arts who had studied the legacy of that ancestor Hegemon of the Ancient race, but the ancestor’s Universe longstaff had refused to follow him.

“Universe treasures possess infinite lifespans, while Daolords only live for 108,000 chaos cycles.” Hegemon Welkin sighed. “If they follow a Daolord and that Daolord fails the Daomerge, they would have to bear the pain of eventually parting with him. This is why Universe treasures generally only choose Eternal Emperors, unless a particular Daolord is extremely intriguing to them.”

“Right.” Ning and Ninedust both nodded. Final farewells were indeed painful to make. The relationships between lifeblood weapons and their masters were almost familial in nature, and the same was true for the relationship between Universe treasures and their masters. This was why so many Universe treasures longed for their original deceased masters despite the passage of many, many chaos cycles. In fact, they would often choose to follow new masters based on similarities between their new master and the old one. They had to have similar personalities, characteristics, and even Daos!

“Alright. You two youngsters should train hard. I hope that in the distant future I’ll be able to meet the two of you again,” Hegemon Welkin said with a laugh. He then waved his hand, causing that flying vessel to appear

once more. He entered his vessel, then tore through spacetime and immediately disappeared.

Ning and Ninedust watched as Hegemon Welkin left with mixed feelings. They understood that the chances of them meeting him again were very, very low.

“Hegemon... I absolute must succeed in my Daomerge and become a Hegemon.” Ninedust ground his teeth.

“Succeed in the Daomerge!” Ning’s eyes were filled with resolution and desire as well.

Neither Ning nor Ninedust were confident in their chances at the Daomerge. Anyone who had mastered a fused Supreme Dao would become a Hegemon upon completing the Daomerge... but alas, this was simply too difficult. As for Ning? His Omega Sword Dao was far more difficult than even that!

Although they didn’t feel confident, they still felt desire and eagerness. The Daomerge was the ultimate goal for any and every Daolord. But of course, in Ning’s heart what mattered the most was still reviving his wife Yu Wei. His cultivation goals and the Daomerge were second to that.

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Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Ning stood there within the empty darkness. He waved a finger, causing the other five Northbow swords to fly out from the sheath on his back towards the great Stone Hellephant Wall in front of him. They joined with the first Northbow sword to form a circular pattern that was roughly a thousand kilometers in diameter.

“Children, do your best to ‘eat’ your way around this area and dig out thousand-kilometer spheres of deepfire blackstone,” Ning called out with a smile.

“Yes, Master.”

“Haha, our master is so clever! He wants us to help him dig out the

deepfire blackstone ore!”

“Leave it to us.”

The children atop the six Northbow swords immediately let out excited calls.

Ninedust was standing next to Ning within the darkness. He said in amazement, “D-Darknorth, are you planning on...?”

“Since the Northbow swords are able to devour the deepfire blackstone, I’m going to use them to harvest as much of the Stone Hellephant Wall as I can,” Ning said. “Not even the Hegemon was able to move this massive thing in its entirety, but if I can segment them into smaller pieces I might be able to do so. If I can, it’ll be worth a quite a pretty sum.”

“True.” Ninedust revealed a look of delight. “All that deepfire blackstone... wow. That really would be a fortune! Haha, I think Hegemon Welkin never would’ve imagined that you could use the Northbow swords to segment the Stone Hellephant Wall. If he did, he wouldn’t have walked away like that.”

“It’s not as much as you think.” Ning shook his head. “Deepfire blackstone doesn’t have that many usages. The reason why it is sold for a fairly high price in the Dao Alliance is because it is fairly rare; the Endless Territories only have three thousand meters of it. Even if I do successfully harvest the entire million-kilometer Stone Hellephant Wall, who am I supposed to sell so much deepfire blackstone to?”

When supply was limited, prices would remain high. When the supply suddenly skyrocketed, the price would drastically crater. This was even more the case given how deepfire blackstone wasn’t very useful. If it was more useful, this wall would’ve been a true fortune! Hegemon Welkin probably would’ve paid any price necessary to invite other major powers to help him out and somehow take away the Stone Hellephant Wall.

“To Hegemons, it isn’t all that valuable. To us, though, this is still a nice sum,” Ning said with a laugh.

Crack, crack, crack. The six Northbow swords continuously devoured the

deepfire blackstone ore, doing their best to carve out a sphere of ore from the Stone Hellephant Wall.

It must be remembered that the six Northbow swords needed to absorb roughly a three hundred thousand meter mountain of ore, an astonishing amount. For them to merely carve out a thousand-kilometer globe of deepfire blackstone meant that they were basically just ‘eating’ a surface portion. It actually wasn’t much at all.

A mere hour later.

“Master.”

“Master, we can’t harvest any more.”

“There’s no way to dig any deeper.” The children atop the six Northbow swords all started to call out towards Ning.

“No way to dig any deeper?” Ning was startled.

“Why can’t they dig any deeper?” The nearby Ninedust also said, “Is there something inside that isn’t deepfire blackstone?”

“Right.”

“It isn’t deepfire blackstone.”

“It’s something else. We can’t absorb it,” the six children called out in unison.

Ning and Ninedust traded a glance. They both had the feeling that the Stone Hellephant Wall perhaps held more secrets than they had expected. It must be remembered that it was over a million kilometers long but just a thousand kilometers wide, making it very ‘flat’. They had thought that it was completely composed of deepfire blackstone, but it seemed as though it held a core of something else.

“Then carve out as much as you can within the thousand-kilometer radius,” Nin instructed.

“Got it.”

“Alright.” All six children called out in unison, working together to

slowly move closer and closer to each other. A short while later, the children called out, “We’re finished!” “Master, we’re done carving!”

“Oh?” Ning sent out his will, using his six Northbow swords to apply a bit of power. Boom! The large round chunk of deepfire blackstone was actually knocked free from the rest of the Stone Hellephant Wall. This chunk of ore was spheroid in shape. It was a thousand kilometers long but only two hundred kilometers ‘deep’.

“Get in here.” Ning walked forwards and grabbed the large chunk of ore, trying to pull it into his estate-world. He immediately sensed how incredibly heavy it was, but he still gave it a try. Boom! The thousand-kilometer chunk of deepfire blackstone was pulled by Ning into his estate-world in its entirety.

“Deepfire blackstone is a valuable natural material. At my current level of power, I’m only able to draw in thousand-kilometer chunks,” Ning said with a laugh. Experts like him were able to gauge their own abilities with a certain type of foresight. The reason he had instructed the Northbow swords to carve out thousand-kilometer chunks was precisely because he could sense that this was a size that would suit him. The entire Stone Hellephant Wall was a thousand times longer than the chunk he had just carved out and much thicker, making it easily a million times more massive. It also had other materials in its core. This was why not even Hegemons could draw it in through force.

“Darknorth, look!” Ninedust had already flown over, and he immediately called out to Ning. Ning flew over as well. When he did, he was able to see that underneath the carved-out pit of deepfire blackstone was some sort of silvery-white material that was covered with many runes. These complicated runes seemed to be part of a single, utterly massive character.

“This script... it seems quite similar in style to the azureflower seal, the Dreamdust script, and those three characters I saw at Crimsonwave Temple.” Ning narrowed his eyes.

“Darknorth, this Stone Hellephant Wall seems to contain a great secret within it.” Ninedust was excited as well.

Chapter 9: Heavenbreaker Stance

With the deepfire blackstone carved away, a strange silvery-white material of unknown origins was revealed beneath it. The silvery-white material was completely sealed and seamless, and the countless runes covering it caused Ji Ning and Ninedust to feel a sense of alarm.

“No openings at all.” Ning frowned, sending out his will. Swish! A fog-formed sword sliced out using the Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop and struck against the silvery-white material. Clank! The power of this strike caused the entire vast Stone Hellephant Wall to tremble, but it wasn’t able to leave the slightest mark behind on the silvery-white material. The Northbow sword launched consecutive attacks against other parts of the silvery-white material, only to fail each time.

“There’s no way to break it at all, and there’s no way for the Northbow sword to absorb it.” Ning shook his head.

“The Stone Hellephant Wall has an outer layer of deepfire blackstone and an inner core of silvery-white material... can it be that the core is completely solid? What in the world was this thing meant for?” Ninedust was puzzled.

“Let’s keep digging!” Ning grinned. “I want to see if the silvery-white object inside the Stone Hellephant Wall really has no openings whatsoever. Even if we end up being unable to discover its secrets, the deepfire blackstone ore alone is still worth quite a sum.”

Ning was quite calm, mentally. He embraced good fortune and misfortune alike! When encountering strange, unknown secrets while adventuring, one could easily fall into danger if one lost mental balance. Death would soon follow.

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Ning and Ninedust continued to watch from within the endless darkness as the six Northbow swords continuously devoured more and more of the outer layer of deepfire blackstone, chopping the Stone Hellephant Wall up into multiple cubes and spheres that were roughly a thousand kilometers

in length. Each time, they only ‘ate’ a thin superficial layer of the ore. Only by doing so would they be able to completely ‘eat’ their way through the entire wall and carve it up.

Time passed, one day after the other. Ning collected every single chunk of deepfire blackstone his swords harvested, causing the outer layer of the Stone Hellephant Wall to continuously shrink in size and reveal more and more of the silvery-white core within. As time passed, the Northbow swords only began to increase the speed at which they ‘ate’.

Two months passed in the blink of an eye. By now, half of the Stone Hellephant Wall had been carved up.

Clank! Yet another giant chunk of deepfire blackstone was revealed.

“Quick, look over there! There’s an entranceway!” Ninedust pointed while exclaiming in surprise.

“An entrance?” Ning’s gaze instantly fell upon the silvery-white core as well. Previously, the giant silvery-white object had been completely seamless. Now, however, they saw a wide passageway that was nearly thirty meters long and sixty meters high! It was completely dark and rather windy, preventing Ning and Ninedust from seeing what lay within.

“There’s actually an entrance?” Ning immediately looked at the opposite end of the chunk of deepfire blackstone that he had just carved out. The ore actually had a passageway within it as well, ending in a door. From the outside, however, there would’ve been no way to see anything at all.

“It seems this is the way inside,” Ning said.

“What should we do, Darknorth? Should we enter?” Ninedust asked. Even a fool could tell that the Stone Hellephant Wall had been artificially created; otherwise, how could it have such a neat and symmetrical entrance?

However, not even Hegemons could produce the vast quantity of deepfire blackstone which made up the outermost layer of the Stone Hellephant Wall. Both of them could sense that the mysteries hidden within had to be absolutely terrifying.

“This was a massive feat in engineering. No ordinary Hegemon could’ve created this wall.” Ning frowned. “Let’s not rush into things. It’s not going anywhere, and it seems unlikely that anyone else in the Great Dark will just so happen to stumble upon this place. Let me finish fully harvesting the deepfire blackstone, then we’ll decide.”

“Alright.” Ninedust nodded as well.

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The Northbow swords were devouring the ore faster and faster. After merely another month, the entire outer layer of deepfire blackstone ore covering the Stone Hellephant Wall had been completely chopped up into thousand-kilometer pieces and put away.

“Mining complete.” Ning revealed a smile. “Children, have you absorbed enough?”

The six Northbow swords flew towards Ning, with six children seated upon them. “Almost full.” “Master, I need just a bit more.” “A little more and I’ll be full.” By now, the Northbow swords had changed yet again in appearance. They now looked almost black in color, with just a faint sheen of golden light and blue light covering them.

“Alright. Eat your fill first. After eating, accompany me inside to take a look.” Ning looked curiously at the completely harvested Stone Hellephant Wall. It was now completely silvery-white and covered with countless runes which formed a single character. Although he had never seen this character before, he understood that it represented the term ‘Tigerhill’.

The Stone Hellephant Wall only had a single entrance, and it had been so well-hidden that not even Hegemon Welkin had been able to discover it. Ning had only been able to find it thanks to his swords being able to carve the deepfire blackstone apart.

The six Northbow swords plunged deep into the final chunk of deepfire blackstone ore, furiously eating away at it. Just half a day later, they had reached their utmost limit.

“Master, I’m completely full. I can’t eat another bite.”

“I’m not able to eat any more of the deepfire blackstone.” The six Northbow swords were happily satiated and flew straight towards Ning.

Ning grabbed one of the Northbow swords to inspect it. They were now noticeably heavier than they had been in the past, and even the pommel was a bit thicker. The blade, however, was as sharp as ever.

“Let me give them a try.” Ning immediately began to execute the five stances of his Omega Sword Dao while Ninedust watched enviously off to one side. He had a lifeblood weapon as well, but it clearly wasn’t developing as nicely as Ning’s was.

BOOM! Ning delivered a chop with a double-handed grip, causing the dark space around him to completely shatter apart. Even time itself broke apart, rendering spacetime a completely meaningless concept in the region around him! This terrifying strike carried a dense mist with it as it struck, crushing through all things that opposed it. It almost instantly vaporized everything within ten billion kilometers, including spacetime itself. This strike was so terrifying that even ten thousand Daolords facing Ning would perish to it.

“How terrifying!” The Ninedust Sectlord was shocked upon seeing this. “T-t-this strike... even Winesage and his Universe treasure are merely on par.”

“Good!” Ning revealed a look of delight as he clenched his sword. This strike was the most powerful attack Ning currently had... the Heavenbreaker stance!

It must be remembered that previously, the Northbow swords had only enhanced the Blood Drop stance to a significant degree, but even then the raw power of the Blood Drop stance was inferior to that of the Heavenbreaker stance! The Blood Drop stance specialized in speed and penetrative power, while the Heavenbreaker stance truly relied on overwhelming might. Ning had relied on successive strikes from the Heavenbreaker stance to overwhelm and completely destroy the Kingfreak, literally beating him to death.

Now that he had infused his Heavenbreaker stance with the power of

the [Heartsword] art and absorbed a prodigious amount of deepfire blackstone with his Northbow swords, his Heavenbreaker stance was comparable to his Blood Drop stance. In raw power, this strike was on the same level as the strikes of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. This was Ning's most dominating, devastating strike to date!

"This feeling of overwhelming, crushing power is absolutely wonderful." Ning felt quite delighted. It wouldn't matter if his foes used intricate techniques; he would be able to smash through them with dominating force! This was what Winesage had done and how he had been able to force all the other Daolords to bow their heads before him. Even Ning had been beaten to the point where he didn't dare fight the man head-on.

"Darknorth, your lifeblood swords have improved quite a bit after devouring all that deepfire blackstone," Ninedust said enviously.

"Yes." Ning gently stroked the flat of the sword. "This was of great help to my Northbow swords... but the [Heartsword] art helped quite a bit as well."

"The [Heartsword] art? The sword-art which Emperor Heartsword created?" Ninedust was shocked.

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"You actually succeeded in training in the [Heartsword] art? I had no idea. Is that why your strikes seem to be filled with sword-shaped mist now? I've heard of it long ago, but I've never seen it in action myself." The Ninedust Sectlord was instantly intrigued by this, as the [Heartsword] art was incredibly famous. Unfortunately there were very, very few were able to gain any level of skill in it; thus far, Ning hadn't encountered a single Daolord capable of using the [Heartsword] art.

"No wonder you are so strong, Darknorth! Ugh, I need to work harder. I can't let you get too far ahead of me." Ninedust was filled with a strong competitive desire.

Ning walked over, reaching out to grab what remained of the final piece of deepfire blackstone and putting it into his estate-world. "Let's go. Time to go inside the Stone Hellephant Wall and see what lies within it."

“Yes, let’s go inside.” Ninedust looked at the distant passageway as well, his eyes blazing with eagerness. “It definitely holds some incredible secrets within it. Maybe I’ll find a Universe treasure that will acknowledge me as its master! Haha... I would have my invulnerable aquaform for defense and a Universe treasure for offense. I’d probably be even more powerful than you, Darknorth!”

“If there really are Universe treasures, make sure I get one as well,” Ning said as he flew forwards alongside Ninedust. Laughing and smiling, the two moved closer and closer to the entranceway.

After going inside, their faces slowly turned solemn. Ning manifested three heads and six arms and held all six Northbow swords at the ready, while the Ninedust Sectlord advanced carefully with his longstaff in hand.

“I’ll scout the path ahead,” Ninedust said.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. Ninedust’s invulnerable aquaform was indeed far better at keeping him alive than what Ning had at present.

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Chapter 10: Tigerhill

The two flew forwards together into the entrance passage. The silvery-white passageway's walls were lined with mysterious runes. Ninedust glanced at them and said, "Those should be barrier formation runes."

"An invisible field of energy is protecting the core of the Stone Hellephant Wall," Ji Ning said solemnly. "I can sense an invisible, omnipresent form of pressure. Even my godsense is affected by it and rendered inoperable."

"Same." Ninedust grew even more cautious as well. Both moved forward with great care, ready to unleash their power at a moment's notice.

After following this passageway for roughly three kilometers, they reached a fork in the road.

"Let's choose this one," Ninedust said.

"Alright. No matter what, the two of us need to stick together. Don't give them any chance to pick us off separately." Ning's expression grew increasingly solemn. When he saw those runes on the walls, he understood that these barriers definitely possessed incredible power.

"Look over there!" A short while later, Ninedust called out excitedly from a corner up ahead as he pointed towards something in front of him. Ning hurriedly charged over, only to see a gaping 'wound' in the silvery-white walls that emanated an aura of terrifying power.

"What in the world?" Ning and Ninedust both moved closer to inspect it carefully.

"Wow." Ninedust stared.

"How is this possible? The entire passageway is formed from this silvery-white substance. I can't even scratch it with a full-force blow. Could it have been completely torn open like this?" Ning stared at the jagged, gaping wounds in the walls of the passageway up ahead. There were five of the tears in total, and all of the runes within the passageway had been completely wrecked.

Every single tear was over three hundred meters long and more than thirty meters deep, thoroughly destroying the formations and script which had covered the passageway walls. In fact, there was some silvery-white debris littering the walls as well.

“Those five tears... they look like they were made by someone using his hand.” Ninedust had a look of disbelief on his face.

“His hand?” Ning couldn’t help but say, “Let me try again. Perhaps the silvery-white substance here is weaker than elsewhere.” As Ning spoke, he set up a barrier to block out any trembles generated in this area, then put away five of his Northbow swords. He gripped the single remaining Northbow sword with all six hands, then struck out with his Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker, sending it directly against a palm-sized silvery-white fragment on the ground.

BOOM! A boundlessly savage blast of power smashed out along with his sword against the silvery-white debris, sending it flying off the ground and smashing directly into the nearby walls.

“Hm.” Ning waved his hand, catching the ricocheting piece of rubble. “Completely undamaged?” Ning stared at the slick piece of debris. The only damage visible was the damage at the very edges, which had been generated when it had been originally torn off the walls by that unknown major power.

“The eight lords of the Sacred Cities might be a bit stronger than me, but this is on a completely different level.” Ning carefully scrutinized the piece of rubble. “It seems someone who was at least as strong as a Hegemon caused the damage here.”

“Right.” Ninedust agreed with this assessment.

Hegemons were far more powerful than them. Their Eternal divine power and their Daos were all far superior... and they generally had Universe treasures at their disposal!

“The runes and barriers in this tunnel have all been wrecked. Come, let’s keep searching,” Ning said.

“Can’t let the rubble go to waste. They might be useful.” Ninedust waved his hand, collecting the bits of silvery-white rubble laying on the ground.

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They continued to advance through the passageway. Ning and Ninedust soon saw another hall that had a strange sacrificial altar within it, but the terrifying claw-marks appeared atop the altar as well. The entire altar had been torn asunder.

They also saw a round, fiery-red pillar that was also covered with countless runes. Clearly, these had been part of a powerful and mysterious formation... but alas, the pillar had also been clawed open as well.

“There clearly was a battle here,” Ninedust said while walking. “An unknown major power caused all of this destruction, wrecking many of the formations here. The person in charge of the Stone Hellephant Wall was completely unable to fight back... but why is it that we don’t see any corpses at all?”

“Look up ahead.” Ning pointed towards the path up in front of them. A completely empty void was there.

“Have we reached the end?” Ning and Ninedust quickly reached the opening, then stared into the void. The vast void was filled with a faint, light blue mist that covered an area of over a hundred billion kilometers. At the very center of this vast void was a dazzling planet that was billions of kilometers in diameter.

“Ninedust, are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Ning asked.

“Ah, so you are thinking about that as well?” Ninedust laughed.

“Right.” Ning nodded. “This style... it should be the Sithe race’s style.” When they had been in that giant humanoid’s body, they had seen that it was filled with countless stone passageways as well as vast planets. Ning had acquired his third disciple in one of those planets, the young man named ‘Skywind’. That giant humanoid had been Sithe, and it had slain one Hegemon outright while injuring a second one so gravely that the second Hegemon, a member of the Ancient race, had passed away from

his wounds.

“The creator of the Stone Hellephant Wall was able to manipulate both deepfire blackstone as well as this unknown silvery-white material in its creation. This really does seem like something the Sithe might do,” Ning said.

“Yes, the Sithe greatly surpassed us cultivators in many areas,” Ninedust agreed. Although the Sithe had been wiped out, their power was undisputable. It was precisely because of how powerful they were that the Autarchs had been forced to lead all cultivator civilizations to war against them. The flames of war had filled countless places, causing the Flamedragon Realmverse to lose all of the Hegemons it had at that time. One could only imagine how miserable that war had been!

“Given how it was floating through the Great Dark, my guess is that the Stone Hellephant Wall was left behind from the Dawn War,” Ninedust said. “It shouldn’t hold too much danger.”

“But it’s completely filled with that invisible aura of power... and I have the feeling that it is even more dangerous than that humanoid creature we were in,” Ning said. “Although it logically shouldn’t be dangerous, even the slightest bit of remaining power might be enough to wipe us both out.”

“Right.” Ninedust narrowed his eyes. “Screw it. Let’s give it a try. We might just find a huge treasure trove inside.”

“Alright, let’s fly over.” Ning was the first to fly towards the planet.

The treasures the Sithe left behind often represented a vast fortune. Crimsonwave Temple was but a single relic, but it was more valuable than the combined networths of all three Hegemons of the Flamedragon Realmverse! Perhaps the Stone Hellephant Wall had something inside that was comparable to Crimsonwave Temple in value. How could Ning possibly shrink back from it?

“There might be living beings inside this planet,” Ninedust said while flying next to Ning. “Last time we entered the homeland of your disciple, Skywind, we were almost immediately discovered by those locals. Should

we perhaps mask our auras this time?”

“Yes, yes we should. Let us pretend to be Daolords of the Second Step,” Ning said.

“Agreed.” Ninedust agreed with this idea.

“Change.” “Change.” Ninedust and Ning immediately changed their auras through the [Vitalis] art. This was the most formidable masking technique they knew, capable of changing even their truesoul’s aura. Ning was simulating the aura which Daolord Pillsaint had back when he was a Daolord of the Second Step, while Ninedust did the same for a different Daolord he knew. The simulation was only effective when used to emulate someone you actually knew. After masking their auras, the two quickly reached the region outside the planet.

“That invisible aura of power is growing stronger.” Ning and Ninedust exchanged a glance. Swoosh. Swoosh. The two carefully flew towards the planet.

The planet was surrounded by a thick layer of clouds and mist. They flew through the multiple layers of clouds, slowly beginning to see the world beneath them.

This was a vast world filled with many mountains, and it was teeming with countless living creatures.

“There’s life here. They look humanoid.” Ning’s vision was frighteningly sharp, allowing him to see them with clarity. “Judging from their auras, the living beings here are all quite strong. There are many Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals, and I can even see Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals.”

Boom! They could sense faint, violent ripples of power emanating from off in the distance. “There’s a fight over there.” Ninedust stared towards the direction of the battle. “Let’s go take a look.”

The two immediately flew over. From their midair position, they were quickly able to see the great battle which was occurring off in the distance. The forces of both sides were fighting furiously against each other.

“All World-level cultivators,” Ninedust said casually. To them, World-level cultivators truly were nothing more than ants. “Nearly sixty of them battling, divided up into two sides.”

“Someone capable of commanding so many World-level cultivators should be fairly strong,” Ninedust said. “We should be able to learn quite a bit regarding this planet from them, and thus more quickly divine the mysteries of this Stone Hellephant Wall.”

“Right.” Ninedust nodded. Both of them remained extremely cautious; just a fraction of the power originally held within the relic sites left behind by the Sithe was enough to claim their lives. How could they NOT be careful?

Ning and Ninedust immediately flew towards the group of battling World-level cultivators.

Chapter 11: Tianello

Ji Ning and Ninedust flew quickly towards the mist to the battlefield. Meanwhile, the battle between the World-level cultivators was reaching a fever pitch.

Slash! Saber-light chopped through a World God's body, slicing him in half. A heartbeat later, his body was ground into dust. The white-robed machete-wielding man then charged towards another World-level cultivator, a hate-filled look on his face. He was clearly the most powerful person on the battlefield. He was extremely fast and his saber-arts were exceptionally brutal.

"Maji!" The other World-level cultivator was clearly in dire straits.

"Maji, stop this!"

"Maji, you despicable lowlife. How dare you assault us members of the Tianello clan!" the other World-level cultivators bellowed furiously.

"You refused to give my clan a way out, so I'm not giving you a way out either! Kill them, my clansmen! Wipe them all out! If a single one of them escapes, we'll be in big trouble. If we can wipe them out, we can relocate our tribe and join one of the Tianello clan's enemies!" Maji had a savage look on his face as he bellowed.

"Kill!"

"Kill these Tianello clansmen!"

"Wipe'm out!"

Although the total combat power of the Tianello clansmen was higher overall, the one named Maji was simply too powerful as an individual. Thus far, he had already killed a total of twelve World-level cultivators by himself in this clash! He had been able to force the warriors of the Tianello clan to the brink of withdrawal, with only their fear of the strict laws of the clan holding them back from a complete retreat.

They had come on the orders of the Tianello clan to take away a treasure this minor clan had acquired, a certain bugbeast core component. They

were so accustomed to behaving in a domineering fashion that they had been planning to massacre the minor clan and then offer the treasure to the high-level members of the clan. As for the other treasures the minor clan had owned? They were going to split them internally.

They had first set up a formation, planning to trap and massacre everyone. They never would've imagined that this weak clan's leader, Maji, was so incredibly powerful that he had been able to burst the formation apart, then lead his clan's World-level cultivators to fight their way out.

"Damnit."

"They actually dare to kill the members of the Tianello clan! Let's leave and report this to the clan immediately! We'll have the clan send out the entire army to wipe them out and leave none of them behind." By now, the Tianello clansmen had been shaken by Maji's assaults. In the end, they chose to retreat. Although they would be punished upon their return for failing in their mission, at least they wouldn't lose their lives.

"Let's go."

"Flee."

Instantly, the World-level cultivators all began to flee frantically. But just as they began to do so, a calm voice rang out. "Don't be in such a rush to run." The fleeing World-level cultivators all felt their bodies turn soft. Their movements began to dramatically slow down before coming to a complete halt... and then they began to slowly fly backwards.

Right at this moment, two figures descended from the skies. One was a silver-robed man, the other was a white-robed youth who bore a sword sheath on his back.

"Daolord!" The World-level cultivators led by Maji all turned pale. The difference in power between World-level cultivators and Daolords was insurmountable.

"The Tianello clan, eh? They seem to be pretty powerful." Ning grinned.

"Then let's start with them," Ninedust offered.

“Agreed.” Ning’s heartforce had already completely pervaded the souls and truesouls of the Tianello clan’s World-level cultivators, allowing him to easily rifle through their souls. Ning’s heartforce was now so powerful that he was ranked number one amongst Daolords in the Endless Territories; manipulating World-level cultivators was simplicity itself for him. Soon, Ning had completely reviewed the memories of these cultivators.

“What did you find?” Ninedust asked.

“This planet is quite interesting.” Ning smirked. As he chatted with Ninedust he made sure to block out the sound of their voices, ensuring that no one aside from the two of them could hear anything.

“Interesting?” Ninedust was puzzled.

Ning said, “This planet is quite extraordinary. It’s far more powerful than that other planet we visited, Skywind’s homeland! The cultivators here are all divided up into clans, with blood lineages determining their statuses.”

“These clans are divided into the great clans, standard clans, and lesser clans. Lesser clans are the weakest, with standard clans generally having a Daolord and several golems standing guard. As for the great clans, they each have at least one ‘royal golem’ protecting them.”

“Supposedly, this planet has nine great clans, twenty-one standard clans, and countless lesser clans,” Ning explained. This was what he had learned through rifling the memories of the World-level cultivators. “Different clans can vary immensely in power. A great clan can easily wipe out one of the standard clans with a fraction of their full power, while standard clans can do the same to lesser clans. The lesser clans are viewed as of a lower caste, almost subhuman.”

Ninedust was startled. “So just how many Daolords live on this planet?”

“More than thirty at the very least,” Ning said. “Possibly sixty, possibly eighty... these World-level cultivators have no clue.”

“Wow.” Ninedust was surprised. A single planet was capable of giving

birth to dozens of Daolords in each given generation? This was a frightening concept.

“The Tianello clan is a standard clan and it has a single Daolord protecting it,” Ning said. “So let us start from them.”

“Alright.” Ninedust nodded.

“You can die now.” Ning swept his gaze towards the dull-eyed World-level cultivators. Instantly, their eyes turned completely lifeless as they fell to the ground. He left just a single World-level cultivator alive, allowing the man ‘Tonkee’ to regain his clarity of mind as well.

“What just happened? What’s going on?” Tonkee stared at the surrounding area in panic. How did all of the others all suddenly die?

“Go back and tell Tianello,” Ning barked, “That I, Darknorth, killed these World Gods! Now beat it!” When Ning had rifled through their memories, he had learned that they were all Tianello’s lackeys and were so evil as to wipe out lesser clans for greed alone. Tonkee was slightly better, morally speaking, than the rest. Still, the only reason why Ning spared him was because he needed someone to send a message for him; otherwise, he would’ve killed Tonkee as well.

“Y-you killed them?” Tonkee stared at Ning in terror.

“I said... beat it.” Ning released a hint of his killing intent.

Swoosh! The terrified Tonkee immediately fled far away.

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Maji and his clansmen stared in shock as they watched this happened, completely stunned by Ning and Ninedust’s power. What stunned them even more was what Ning had just said: “Go back and tell Tianello that I, Darknorth, killed these World Gods! Now beat it!” This clearly was a direct challenge to Tianello!

Tianello was the name of the Tianello clan’s leader, and he was on extremely good terms with the nine great clans. He was one of the high-level members of this world. He wasn’t an easy person to deal with!

“Senior” Maji said, forcing down his fear and nervousness. Looks of panic were on the faces of all the World-level cultivators behind him.

“What, are you scared now?” A hint of a smile was on Ning’s face.

Maji hurriedly said, “For us to fight back against them when they tried to kill us was a minor matter; the exalted Tianello would never deign to act against minor figures like us, giving us a chance to survive if we joined an enemy of the Tianello clan. But by doing this, seniors... you’ve just completely insulted him! He’s not going to rest until he resolves this matter, and his rage will be directed towards us as well.”

People lived for their reputations. There were only a few dozen Daolords on this planet, making them exalted figures. How could Tianello possibly just accept Ning brazenly slapping him in the face like this?

“Are you trying to say that we caused trouble for you?” Ninedust glared at them.

“N-no...” Maji began to sweat heavily.

“Ahahaha!” Ning started to laugh. “Ninedust, stop scaring these kids.” Indeed, Maji and the other World-level cultivators all felt rather uneasy now. “Just keep watching,” Ning instructed. “I’ll guarantee your safety.”

Maji and the others felt resigned. “I guess that’s that.” If they followed these two powerful Daolords, they might stand a chance at staying alive... but once they were on their own, it would be far too easy for Tianello to eradicate them.

Just one hour later, a giant vessel appeared in the skies. A white-haired old man stood at the prow of the vessel, staring towards their direction. He had a group of subordinates behind him.

“Tianello has arrived.”

“It’s Tianello.” Maji and the others felt nervous and cold.

Ning and Ninedust raised their heads to glance at the vessel. Ninedust grinned at Ning: “He’s a mere Daolord of the Third Step, but he seems pretty full of himself.”

The grand vessel slowly flew through the skies towards them. The white-robed elder stood at the prow of the ship, staring down at them. When he saw that Ning and Ninedust merely had auras of Daolords of the Second Step, he relaxed slightly. He barked out coldly, "You dared to wipe out Tianello clansmen and then insulted me? It seems that it has been far too long since I, Tianello, have displayed my pow-."

"So shut up and do it already," Ninedust said from below.

"Eh?" Tianello was further incensed by this interruption, and cold light flickered in his eyes. "If that is what you wish... then I will send you off to die!"

Whoosh. A giant bird that was at least three thousand meters long suddenly appeared in front of Tianello. This bird was covered in azure feathers and had a fiery red tail, as well as an awe-inspiring aura. It was actually just as powerful as Tianello, and it immediately swooped downwards.

Chapter 12: Sithe?

Maji and the other World-level cultivators behind Ji Ning and Ninedust had started to panic long ago. If you have to hit someone, you aren't supposed to slap them in the face! Not even Daolords would brazenly provoke other Daolords for no good reason. Ning's provocative actions were designed to force Tianello out. If he hid back despite all of this, he would probably become the laughingstock of this world.

"Now that's rather interesting." Ninedust waved his right hand, causing it to dramatically expand in size. It blocked out the skies and the sun as it clawed out towards the avian. The avian let out a furious screech as it tore at Ninedust's hand with its claws.

Whoosh! As an Ancient cultivator, Ninedust had an incredibly powerful divine body. Given that he was now a supreme Daolord, even a casual swipe from him was far beyond the likes of a golem which was merely equivalent to a Daolord of the Third Step. His giant fingers closed in around the avian, which sought to struggle but was completely unable to break free.

"What?!" Tianello was shocked when he saw this from his position aboard his ship. His golem was equivalent to him in power, but it had been captured by a casual swipe?

"He's absolutely terrifying. They're definitely not people that I can fight back against. I need to run." Tianello immediately fled, not worrying about anything else at all.

Ning was standing on the ground, head raised and watching this with a smile. "Come on down." An invisible surge of power instantly swept out to cover the entire vessel.

All of the cultivators on the vessel, Tianello included, were instantly trapped within an illusory world. The entire vessel began to descend from the skies and landed on the ground. One figure after another began to walk out of the vessel, their eyes blank. The leader of the group was the white-haired elder Tianello, whose gaze was equally vacant. He wasn't

able to fight back at all.

“T-this...” Maji and the other World-level cultivators stared at this in astonishment. The mighty Tianello had been mentally dominated before even having a chance to fight in close combat? This was inconceivable!

“Tianello,” Ning called out. “I ask you this: who are the most powerful people within this world?”

“The top three clans of the nine great clans are the Fumo clan, the Juwah clan, and the Nonti clan. These three great clans are far more powerful than the other six great clans.” Tianello’s gaze was vacant as he continued, “The Fumo clan, the Juwah clan, and the Nonti clan are incredibly powerful. Any of them could wipe out the other six great clans with ease.”

“They call themselves members of the ‘Sithe’ race. All other clans have to submit to them, and they are the true rulers of this world,” Tianello said numbly.

Ning and Ninedust turned pale when they heard this. What?! The three most powerful clans in this planet actually referred to themselves as ‘Sithe’?

“They call themselves ‘Sithe’? Why?” Ning asked.

“Don’t know. They are the most ancient and most powerful clans on this planet. No one can resist them,” Tianello said. “Those who try to do so all died.”

Ning and Ninedust exchanged a glance.

“Darknorth... is it possible that a few scattered members of the Sithe actually survived?” Ninedust said. Both he and Darknorth suspected that the Stone Hellephant Wall had been created by the Sithe! It wasn’t impossible that some Sithe survived to live on this planet.

“Entirely possible.” Ning was much more somber now as well. “If it really is the Sithe... we’re in a great deal of danger.”

“Do the three great clans have any Eternal Emperors? Does this world

hold any Eternal Emperors?” Ning asked.

“None.” Tianello replied robotically, “It has been a long, long time since any Emperors have appeared within this world. The annals of history do contain records of an Eternal Emperor who launched a grand war against the three great clans, but they joined forces and managed to kill him.”

“They killed an Eternal Emperor?” Ning frowned. “Was that Emperor an ordinary Daolord who broke through, or was he an incredibly powerful one?”

“He was an ordinary Daolord who broke through,” Tianello replied.

Both Ning and Ninedust let out sighs of relief.

“Should we hit’m?” Ninedust looked at Ning.

“Of course.” Ning nodded. “If they title themselves ‘Sithe’, then they are actual Sithe survivors or inheritors of the Sithe legacy. No matter what, they definitely know some of the secrets of the Sithe! If all three great clans had to work together to deal with an ordinary Daolord who broke through to become an Eternal Emperor, they shouldn’t be all that powerful.”

“At least they don’t have any Eternal Emperors at present.” Ninedust nodded as well. If they didn’t have any Eternal Emperors, it didn’t matter if they had access to Sithe technology and techniques. Ning and Ninedust were both supreme Daolords! They were both capable of slaying ordinary Eternal Emperors, especially Ning; Ning was now close to being on the same level as the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. Perhaps he was still rather lacking when compared to them, but he would be able to utterly dominate any Daolords.

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As Ning and Ninedust discussed this secretive matters, they didn’t let Maji or the others overhear them. Maji and his World-level companions only watched as Tianello stared blankly as he spoke words they couldn’t hear.

“Awaken,” Ning commanded softly. Tianello immediately came back to

his senses, as did the subordinates behind him. When he did so, he instantly felt terrified. He could clearly remember what he had just told Ning.

“Y-y-you...” Tianello couldn’t believe it. There was actually a person in this world capable of controlling him and forcing him to reveal some of his secrets.

“Self-claimed Sithe... interesting.” Ning looked at Ninedust. “Let’s do it.”

“You first,” Ninedust grinned.

There was a limit to how strong the three great clans were. They didn’t even have a single Emperor! They did, however, claim themselves to be the ‘Sithe’, which meant they definitely were in command of certain Sithe mysteries. Given that it shouldn’t be all that dangerous, how could Ning and Ninedust just leave?

“Heartworld, descend!” Ning immediately unleashed his heartworld projection.

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The vast heartworld projection came crashing down, filling every single inch of this entire planet. The powerful sense of pressure brought terror to all of the countless living beings in the planet... but of course, Ning didn’t use it to attack any of those weaklings.

“What’s going on?”

“Why do I feel as though an illusory world just fell upon us?”

The countless living creatures all raised their heads to stare upwards.

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“This must be a Heartforce Cultivator’s heartworld projection.”

“It has been a long time since a Heartworld Cultivator has appeared in our planet. Has a new one arisen?”

“This heartworld projection is far too powerful. Even I feel a sense of fear! If it releases just a bit of its power, it could kill the two of us with

ease.” A male and female pair of Daolords raised their heads to stare into the skies, a look of shock on their faces.

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“Who is it?”

“Who dares to act with such arrogance, using a heartworld projection to suppress my Nonti clan!” A furious roar rang out from a beautiful golden palace.

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Everyone on this entire planet, from the three great clans to the countless ordinary living creatures, all raised their heads to watch as the awesome heartworld projection descended. A short while later, the image of a white-robed youth who had a sword on his back appeared within the heartworld projection. He was absolutely towering in size, and he stared down upon the great earth, his gaze seeming to fill every inch of it.

“I hear that the Fumo clan, the Juwah clan, and the Nonti clan are the three most powerful great clans of this world and have unified it under their rule! But... no matter how hard I try, I can’t discern anything particularly impressive about these three great clans. I was planning to wipe them out, but their Daolords are so weak that I can’t even be bothered to do so.”

“Listen closely. I can’t be bothered to wipe your three clans out, but from this day forth you should obediently listen to my commands. If you do so, I’ll let you live. Otherwise... hmph!”

“Impudence!”

“He’s courting death.”

“Where did this fool even come from?” Three enraged roars rang out from the three great clans, shaking the entire planet. The leaders of the Fumo, Juwah, and Nonti clans had been thoroughly enraged. They had ruled this planet for countless years. No one dared to challenge them... but this mysterious Heartforce Cultivator was being far too arrogant.

“Haha, you seem rather bold. I, Darknorth, shall be waiting for you at the Cranesoar Mountains. If you insist on coming to your deaths, feel free to come find me here.” The illusory white-robed youth within the heartworld projection peered downwards at the three great clans. “But I really suggest that you not come. You’d simply be throwing your lives away if you did... because all of you really are quite weak. Aha,ahaha, ahahahahaha!” Ning’s laughter echoed throughout every inch of this planet.

The wilderness at the base of the Cranesoar Mountains.

Maji and the other World-level cultivators stared at Ning and Ninedust, completely dazed. Tianello and the World-level cultivators behind him were dazed as well. All of them had seen that heartworld projection and had heard Ning’s provocations.

“He’s... actually challenging the three great clans?” Tianello’s voice was trembling.

“W-who in the world are they?” Maji and the others were petrified as well.

Ning and Ninedust, however, remained quite calm. “All done.” Ning nodded at Ninedust. “Given the status these three great clans hold, there’s no way they’d just take that lying down. They’ll definitely attack.”

“Agreed.” Ninedust concurred. “That way, this battle is at a time and place of our choosing. That’s of benefit to us.”

Given that these three great clans called themselves the Sithe, Ning and Ninedust were concerned that their headquarters probably wouldn’t be easily destroyed. Thus, they would choose a different place for the battle! Ning’s deliberate provocations were aimed at forcing his enemies to come to the Cranesoar Mountains, as there were no dangerous formations here to worry about.

Although Ning was talking tough, he wasn’t so foolish as to actually charge straight into the headquarters of the three great clans.

Chapter 13: Emperor Golems

The challenge having been issued, Ji Ning and Ninedust entered the Cranesoar Mountains and awaited the arrival of the three great clans. In truth, Ning was right to be cautious. This planet held many mysteries within it.

Deep within the planet's core. There was a bubbling lake of lava here, and there were three figures seated next to it. These three figures all had silver skin, and the auras they emanated were different from the auras of normal cultivators. They were quite bizarre and inscrutable.

One of them, a particularly muscular silver man, let out a growl: "He actually dares to challenge all three of our clans simultaneously. My fellow clan leaders of the Juwah clan and Nonti clan, have either of you heard of this 'Darknorth' before?"

"Never heard of him." "I have no idea where he came from." the two other silver men responded.

"This 'Darknorth' is extremely arrogant, and his heartworld projection is incredibly powerful. In heartforce, at least, he's reached the utter apex." The muscular silver man said, "I find it very likely that he's a supreme Daolord."

"A supreme Daolord? Haha, after so many years, this planet of ours has finally given birth to yet another supreme Daolord," the skinnier silver man said.

"The birth of every supreme Daolord is rather diverting to our three clans," the long silver-haired man said. "To our three clans, there is nothing in this planet that can pose a threat to us. That makes life rather boring. The other six clans are only 'great clans' because they have some small portion of our bloodlines and lineage, and so we've bestowed the title of 'great clan' upon them. If it wasn't for that... hmph."

"How can those other lowly clans compare with us, the exalted Sithe?" The muscular silver man said coldly, "Since this supreme Daolord has chosen to challenge us and is an extremely strong Heartforce Cultivator...

how do the two of you think we should response?”

“I’ll go personally kill him,” the skinny silver man said.

“Both of us have undergone the ‘Ritual Sacrificium’, making us the only true Sithe in this entire planet.” The silver-haired, silver-skinned man shook his head. “For noble Sithe like us to lower ourselves to fight against these lowly races is demeaning. Sending golems is enough.”

“I also feel that sending golems should suffice. My recommendation is that each of our three clans should send out two Emperor-class golems. What do you think?” the muscular silver man asked.

“Fine.”

“Sending two Emperor-class golems is more than enough.” The other two silver men agreed with this proposal. Their clans possessed exalted power. Even a tiny fraction of their full might was enough to completely dominate this entire world.

Over the course of countless years, their world had actually given birth to an Eternal Emperor. However, that Eternal Emperor had been extremely weak. In comparison, there had been far more supreme Daolords in the history of this world. There was usually at least one in every generation! Some of them dared to try and challenge the status of the three great clans... and all of them died!

Nobody could resist them! They were the true, indisputable, unshakeable rulers of this planet. They always had been and they always would be! In truth, the power they had revealed to wipe out those upstart challengers had always been nothing more than a fraction of their full power.

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Within a dark room in the Fumo clan. There were six pitch-black figures seated with their eyes shut, completely unmoving. Suddenly, two of the pitch-black figures opened their eyes. Their eyes gleamed with green, crystalline light.

“Master.” both golems called out respectfully.

“There’s a Heartforce Cultivator known as Darknorth. He seems to be a supreme Daolord, and he’s chosen to challenge the Sithe. The two of you shall head to the Cranesoar Mountains and kill him.” The muscular silver man’s voice boomed out, echoing throughout the room.

“Understood,” both figures said respectfully. The other four pitch-black figures opened their eyes as well.

“The two of us are going to go out and have some first, brothers. Hahaha...” The two golems laughed quite smugly.

“Hurry up and kill this Daolord Darknorth, then come back and tell us all about it.”

“Yeah, I’m bored senseless.”

“A pity that Master has only sent the two of you.” The other four golems spoke out as well. As golems, they possessed eternal lifespans. This world wasn’t all that large; they knew every inch of it by now! This was why they normally preferred to spend their time in slumber. Only when the clan encountered some fairly troublesome opponents like ‘supreme Daolords’ would they be sent out.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

The two Emperor-class golems immediately left the room and soared into the skies.

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The Cranesoar Mountains. Tianello, Maji, and the others all watched nervously. Ning and Ninedust, however, simply waited patiently.

“Eh?” Ning’s face tightened slightly as he stared off into the distance.

“What’s wrong?” Ninedust was puzzled.

“The three clans have sent their troops out towards the Cranesoar Mountains.” Puzzled, Ning continued, “But... they each only sent a pair of golems. All combined, there are six of them.”

“Six golems against the two of us?” Ninedust was puzzled as well.

“Darknorth, the heartworld projection you revealed should’ve alerted

them that you are probably at the supreme Daolord level. Why have they only sent six golems? Based on what I know, most golems are merely comparable to fourth-step Daolords at best.”

“There ARE some golems that are stronger than the Daolord level,” Ning said.

“True.” Ninedust nodded. The major powers of the Endless Territories were only able to create golems comparable to Daolords of the Fourth Step at best. However... some particularly dangerous regions sometimes held golems that had been left behind since the Dawn War which surpassed this level. Ning had personally seen those two mighty golems which stood guard over the palace of the Brightshore Imperials. One looked like a humanoid statue while the other was a bestial statue, but both were actually golems which held the power of Eternal Emperors. No one knew where the Brightshore Hegemon had found them.

“You are talking about Emperor-class golems,” Ninedust said. “We Ancient cultivators have some, but they were passed down to us from many, many years ago. The Endless Territories have very few Emperor-class golems, and the number we Ancient cultivators have can be counted on one hand. Are you telling me that all six golems attacking us are Emperor-class? Since when did they become as common as the grass?”

“I find it hard to believe as well,” Ning said with a sigh. Emperor-class golems... they could only be found in truly dangerous zones such as the battlefield of the Dawn War. They were incredibly rare... but now, six had appeared at the same time?

“But if they aren’t Emperor-class, how would the three great clans dare to send just six of them against us?” Ning shook his head. “They should know that I have the power of a supreme Daolord; sending Daolord-class golems against me is tantamount to just gifting me with treasures. Thus... although I still find it hard to believe, it does seem as though these should be Emperor-class golems.”

“Six Emperor-class golems.” Ninedust revealed a wary look. “Can we handle them?”

“There should be differences in power amongst Emperor-class golems; some are strong, some are weak. We should be able to handle them,” Ning said.

The creation of every Emperor-class golem was extremely difficult. The Endless Territories weren't even able to make them, with only fourth-step Daolord golems being forgeable! Thus, every single Emperor-class golem had their own unique traits. They all had invulnerable bodies, and in accordance with the wishes of their makers they often knew certain ultimate attacks as well! Even Ning felt nervous at the thought of fighting six at once.

If he was still ‘merely’ at the supreme Daolord level, he would probably be even more nervous. However, the Northbow swords and the [Heartsword] art put Ning close to the level of the lords of the eight Sacred Cities. Thus, he still felt fairly good in his chances.

“What’s going on with them?”

“Those two... something seems off with them.” Tianello, Maji, and the others all noticed the somber looks appear on the faces of Ning and Ninedust, who had appeared quite relaxed just a short while ago.

Tianello shook his head and sighed, “None of the three great clans are easy to deal with. Ever since the earliest annals of recorded history, the three great clans have always jointly ruled over our planet together. No one has ever been able to threaten them. Ugh. These two Daolords might be very powerful, but they were too over-confident. They are courting death.”

Ning and Ninedust couldn't even be bothered to talk to the cultivators behind them. They simply stared into the skies, somber looks on their faces.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The six distant golems soared through the skies, emanating auras of incredible power as they flew towards Ning and Ninedust.

“This level of power...” Ninedust murmured softly, “The aura emanating

from them as they are flying is already far beyond what Daolords of the Fourth Step are capable of. They are definitely Emperor-class. Darknorth, this is going to be seriously troublesome. I didn't expect the three great clans to be this strong."

Emperor-class golems were far more difficult to deal with than ordinary Eternal Emperors. They were virtually indestructible! Ning had only trained his body to make it comparable to a middle-grade Eternal treasure, but Emperor-class golems were all top-grade Eternal treasures. The techniques they used were based on the designs of their makers.

"Since the three great clans are connected to the Sithe and even call themselves the Sithe, it's not that surprising that they have a few tricks up their sleeves." Ning's eyes radiated an eagerness to do battle.

Chapter 14: Surrounded And Attacked

“Move a bit farther away,” Ji Ning suddenly said, his voice ringing out by the ears of Tinello, Maji, and the other cultivators.

“Huh?” The cultivators were all stunned.

“He’s telling you to run the hell away.” Ninedust turned to stare at them. “Once the battle starts, even the smallest of shockwaves will be enough to claim your lives. We certainly won’t be able to pay attention to you and keep you safe.”

“Let’s go.”

“Quickly.” Tianello, Maji, and the others immediately reacted, transforming into streaks of light that flew far away.

Ning raised his head, watching as the six figures flew towards them at high speeds. He manifested three heads and six arms, then drew all six Northbow swords. “Here they come. Good.”

“I’m also curious as to just how tough Emperor-class golems are.” Ninedust had his longstaff at the ready and was also watching.

The six golems in midair all came to a halt. They hung in the air, staring downwards as if they were looking at ants. As Emperor-class golems who had been working for the three great clans since the clans had been established, they had killed many supreme Daolords over the course of countless years. Thus, they were completely confident in their chances.

“Which one of you is Daolord Darknorth?” The swordsman golem stared downwards. Of the six golems, this one was the only one wielding a sword.

“Me,” Ning said.

“You actually dared to challenge the three great clans. Poor kid... do you have any clue as to how powerful they truly are? You really didn’t know your own limits.” The swordsman golem stared at Ning in a rather sympathetic way, then glanced at Ninedust. “And this Daolord next to you. Is he with you? If he leaves immediately, we can spare him. Otherwise, we’ll have to wipe him out as well.”

Back on the ground, Ninedust and Ning exchanged a glance, then smiled. Ninedust said with a cold laugh, "You want to kill me? Give me your best shot and show me what you have."

"I wanted to give you a way out of this. Oh well. If this is what you choose..." The swordsman golem sighed and shook his head, then said in a cold voice, "Let's kill them, brothers!"

"Attack!"

"Let me go first!" The six golems moved in unison.

Ning, however, let out a cold snort. Boom! The heartworld projection that had been covering this entire planet instantly shrank down to merely cover an area of a million kilometers, causing its power to skyrocket! It pressed down upon the six golems, causing all of them to feel their bodies stiffen. At the same time, Ning allowed nine energy dragons to fly out of his body, forming into the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and sending the pressure of the domain out towards the golems as well.

"What a powerful binding spell."

"Why do I feel this heavy?" Upon being suppressed by the heartworld projection and the Yin-Yang Sword Domain at the same time, the six golems were just barely able to stay afloat. They felt as though trillions of mountains had just come crashing down upon them, weighing them down immensely.

These Emperor-class golems had been around for an extremely long period of time and had encountered both supreme Daolords and Heartforce Cultivators. However, the local 'supreme Daolords' had always been limited to this fairly small region; there was simply no way for them to find the materials necessary to create truly powerful secret arts! Thus, Ning's combination of his nine novessence arts and his heartworld projection constituted the most powerful bindings which the Emperor-class golems had ever encountered.

"Heavy." The six golems exchanged glances.

"Kill him!" one of the golems bellowed, leading the way with a charge.

Crack! A streak of golden lightning lashed out through the skies, instantly appearing before Ning. Ning was quite surprised as well; this attack was incredibly fast! The speed of this golden lightning had completely surpassed the 'normal' limit of a hundred times the speed of light, almost instantly appearing right in front of Ning. Within the streak of golden lightning, a sharp saber could be seen chopping straight towards Ning with incomparable speed and savagery.

"Beat it." Ning didn't back off in the slightest. A streak of mist-formed sword energy clashed against the saber. Boom! The golden lightning was knocked flying backwards, reforming into a humanoid shape off in the distance. The creature was dressed in golden armor and had jade green eyes; it was the 'lightning golem' of the six golems.

Ning glanced sideways at the lightning golem. Judging from the clash, the lightning golem was roughly on par with ordinary supreme Daolords; its main strength came from its speed. Ning's own sword-arts were also incredibly fast, allowing him to crush this golem.

"Move!"

"Attack!"

"Join forces to kill him!" The other golems began to strike as well.

Boom! An awesome flood of flames manifested, then condensed into a flaming serpent that slithered towards Ning. It suddenly opened its mouth as if about to hiss, sending a black whip coiling straight towards Ning.

"A flame golem?" Ning used his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop yet again. His sword was fast enough that defeating enemy techniques was fairly easy, unless the attacks contained a ridiculous amount of power. It was clear that the whip-strike from the flame golem was merely on par with that of a supreme Daolord, and so Ning's mist-formed sword energy was able to easily disperse it.

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Aside from the lightning golem and the flame golem, there was also a strange mist golem that was able to block detection via heartforce or

godsense. Fortunately, Ning's heartworld projection and nine novessence arts were not affected. The supreme Daolords of this world rarely had powerful secret arts or heartworld projections, and so once the mist surrounded them they wouldn't be able to see what was happening around them. As a result, they would be easily defeated and slain.

There was also an extremely deadly eight-armed knife golem. The knife golem had eight arms, and each of its arms was like a deadly knife. It was fast and furious in battle, and each knife-arm struck in an extremely unpredictable manner. When all eight knives struck together, even Ninedust wasn't able to overcome the attacks in a head-on fight. However, Ning was a sword cultivator who was incredibly skilled in close combat, allowing him to easily defeat the eight-armed knife golem.

There was also a barbarous and dominating golem whose skin was like stone. This stone golem was massive in size and had six arms, with each arm sculpted like a statue. It possessed incredible strength and powerful defenses and was able to take on Ning's Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop without being forced back. Its six arms smashed out like giant maces, and it was the physically strongest golem.

Still, Ning was able to use the Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker. Now that his Northbow swords had absorbed so much of that deepfire blackstone, the power of this stance had skyrocketed to a shocking new level, allowing him to defeat the stone golem head-on as well.

The final golem was the leader of the group, the swordsman golem. The swordsman golem transformed into part of an enormous sword when using its sword-arts. The sword pierced through the skies with absolutely terrifying power, and it was the most dangerous attack Ning had to face. Despite all that, it was still staved off by Ning's Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop.

The difference in power between the two sides was quite apparent. The six golems each had their own special abilities and were all comparable to supreme Daolords; if they were to work together against the likes of the Radiant King or Daolord Dreamlore, they would've won with ease. But against Ning? Clearly, they weren't enough.

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Although the above battle took time to describe, the attacks from the six golems and Ning's counters all happened almost instantaneously. Ning matched each of them blow for blow and defeated them all.

"Daolord Darknorth is much stronger than any other supreme Daolord we have ever encountered. Brothers, attack simultaneously to defeat him!" the swordsman golem shouted mentally to the others.

"Join forces."

"Same as always." These Emperor-class golems were quite familiar with each other, and they had a joint attack they used. They almost instantly began to move in unison.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. A dazzling streak of golden light, a flaming serpent, and a ribbon of mist coiled around each other, forming a tri-colored rope that then swirled towards Ning. As for Ninedust, he transformed into a vast sea of water which the golems were completely unable to do anything to.

The three great clans did have some techniques they were able to use against supreme Daolords who had invulnerable forms, but these six Emperor-class golems didn't view Ninedust as being that much of a threat. The real threat was Darknorth, and he was their principal opponent in this fight.

"Damn." Ning immediately could sense how troublesome this tri-colored rope was. He used his sword-arts to cut through the rope, but the flames, lightning, and mist joined together once more to reform the rope. Ning's strikes didn't have any effect on the terrifying binding power of the tri-colored rope at all. Ning had no choice but to amplify the effects of his novessence arts and his heartworld projection upon the tri-colored rope, but he was still only able to partially weaken their power.

"This thing really is quite difficult to deal with." Ning had been completely surrounded by the lightning, mist, and flame-forged rope. Because these things were noncorporeal, Ning was still able to move about and fight, but his combat power had clearly been affected.

If the rope had been corporeal, this would've been much easier. Ning's sword-arts would've sent the rope flying long ago.

“Catch him, Stone!”

“Give'm a big hug.”

“Make it so that he can't fight back!” the other golems called out as the six-armed stone golem came bounding straight towards Ning. Its six arms grew incredibly thick and long as it reached out, seeking to grab Ning! Ning knew just how strong this stone golem was; it had been able to endure Ning's Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop without even having to stagger backwards at all. If it really did manage to grapple Ning, Ning wouldn't be able to break free at all.

Chapter 15: Captured

The tri-colored rope coiled around Ji Ning, affecting and encumbering all of his movements.

“I did this in the past to others. Now, the same is happening to me. I can at most unleash 70% of my full power.” Ning was secretly stunned. This was despite the fact that the fire, lightning, and mist were being weakened by his heartworld projection and nine novessence arts. If it hadn’t been for the latter two, he would probably be weakened even more.

“Beat it!” When Ning saw the stone golem bound towards him and seek to grapple him, he immediately used his Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker. BOOM! The stone golem was sent flying backwards.

“What? Even when we bind him, he’s still able to send Stone flying?”

“How can he be this powerful?” The other Emperor-class golems were all stunned.

“Stone, try again. You have to be able to grab him. We’ll help you!”

“If you can grapple him, he’ll be dead for sure.”

“Alright. I will try again.” The stone golem once more bounded forwards. This time, the swordsman golem also transformed into a single sword that hovered above the eight-armed knife golem. The eight-armed knife golem charged towards Ning as well, with the sword ready to strike at any moment. As for the stone golem, it also charged forwards at the same time.

“Need my help, Darknorth?” The Ninedust Sectlord was still in his oceanic form, but he wasn’t in a hurry to intervene just yet.

“No need,” Ning sent back. “I’ll feign weakness for now. Wait for a critical moment before intervening.”

“Alright,” Ninedust replied.

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The tri-colored rope coiled towards Ning as the swordsman golem, the

eight-armed golem, and the stone golem attacked simultaneously.

A fierce light flashed through Ning's eyes. "This is the right moment." Swoosh! Ning flew straight towards the eight-armed knife golem and the swordsman golem. The two golems naturally struck out at him, sending streaks of mysterious knife-light and sharp sword-light slicing towards him.

Boom! Boom! Ning responded with just two streaks of mist-formed sword energy; this was his Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker.

This stance seemed clumsy and straightforward, but it contained the profundity of his Omega Sword Dao and his other stances, allowing him to easily strike his foes head-on.

These two strikes from his two Northbow swords contained power that was comparable to that of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. The eight-armed golem and the swordsman golem were both sent flying backwards. It must be remembered that even the strongest golem, the stone golem, was unable to withstand this stance. How could these two possibly do so?

"Now come here." Ning's lips split open into a grin as he faced the stone golem that was charging towards him, arms spread wide. The swordsman golem and the eight-armed golem had already been knocked flying backwards; for the next few moments, they wouldn't be able to assist the stone golem.

Whooooosh. Ning's sword-light drifted out in an ephemeral, mysterious fashion. This was his Shadowless stance!

Although the tri-colored rope were slowing him down, preventing his sword-light from being truly traceless and shadow less, it was still incredibly unpredictable. Although the stone golem was extremely strong and ferocious, it had major flaws as well; namely, its speed and agility! When Ning executed this Shadowless stance and infused the [Heartsword] arts into it, the stone golem was only able to block a single one of Ning's swords with its six arms. It was unable to withstand the others.

Swish! The Northbow swords furiously and rapidly began to coil around the stone golem like a soft rope, tying dozens of knots around it.

“No!” the stone golem let out a furious bellow. It had wanted to grapple Ning, but instead it had been captured.

“Get in here.” Completely bound, the stone golem was unable to fight back at all as Ning sent out his will, forcefully drawing the golem into his estate-world.

“Ninedust, move to block the swordsman golem.” Ning turned, focusing his gaze on the nearby eight-armed golem which was once more seeking to charge at him.

“Alright.” Ninedust was excited as well. The other five Emperor-class golems, however, began to panic!

Ning’s initial clashes against them had been nothing more than probes designed to help him understand what the golems were skilled in, so as to prepare a proper battle plan! The initial clashes had let him understand that the flame golem, lightning golem, and mist golem all had abilities that were similar to ‘invulnerable forms’; there was nothing he could do to them at all. Thus, Ning turned his attention to the other three golems.

The stone golem had seemed to be the strongest and most ferocious, but its flaws were also the most obvious. In the end, it was the easiest one to deal with.

“Not good.”

“Stone’s been captured.”

“This Daolord is too powerful.”

“Master commands us to retreat immediately!”

“Master has commanded a retreat.”

“Withdraw!”

The three clan leaders had immediately received word that even though their six Emperor-class golems had assaulted Daolord Darknorth in unison, one of them had ended up being captured. They immediately issued an order to withdraw! The loss of every single Emperor-class golem, to the three great clans, was quite painful.

Swoosh! Swoosh! The eight-armed golem and the swordsman golem immediately began to flee.

“You aren’t going anywhere.” Ning’s heartworld projection and nine novessence arts were completely focused on suppressing the eight-armed golem and swordsman golem.

Ning’s first target was the eight-armed golem, and he charged towards it by himself. Both sides were being slowed and restricted, but Ning was faster than the eight-armed golem to begin with! The difference between them in power was apparent.

“Run! Run!” The eight-armed golem was panicking.

“You aren’t running anywhere.” Ning caught up, then used his Omega Sword Dao – Shadowless to once more launch an unpredictable sword-art attack against the golem.

The eight-armed golem was clearly quite agile, and its eight arms set up a mysterious defensive pattern to defend. As for Ning, he alternated between the Shadowless stance and the Heavenbreaker stance, sometimes also switching to the incredibly fast Blood Drop stance! Just three breaths of time later, the eight-armed golem’s defenses had been penetrated. One of Ning’s swords wrapped directly around the eight-armed golem’s waist, the Northbow sword having transformed to become long and soft as it wrapped itself around the golem like a ball.

“Come here.” Ning drew the eight-armed golem into his estate-world as well.

“How can this be happening?”

“How can this Daolord be so powerful?”

“Daolord Darknorth, you really are courting death!” The three golems which made up the tri-colored rope were howling furiously, but they were even weaker than the eight-armed golem in close combat. When used to bind and slow Ning, they were quite effective, but once they stopped doing so and Ning was able to unleash his full power... their defeat would be swift and sure.

“Ahahaha! None of you are escaping!” Ninedust transformed into a sea of water as he furiously battled against the swordsman golem. The water coiled around the golem, with Ninedust’s upper body visible as he used his longstaff to batter the swordsman golem at will. Given that the swordsman golem was being affected by both the heartworld projection and the nine novessence arts, Ninedust was able to completely dominate it. It had no chance to flee at all.

“No, no, NO! Get the hell away from me!” The swordsman golem was furiously struggling but unable to shake off Ninedust. Finally, Ning arrived. With Ning and Ninedust fighting together the swordsman golem was caught in literally a single second, then drawn into the estate-world.

The three elemental golems realized that there was nothing they could do. They had no choice but to quickly flee and retreat.

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Tianello, Maji, and the others hadn’t moved too far away. They were able to watch this fight from afar. Truth be told, their situation was quite grim; they were terrified that the three great clans would view them as being a party to this and blame them, and thus they didn’t dare to move too far away.

“How terrifying.” They stared at the battlefield, the Cranesoar Mountains having been reduced to rubble long ago. The few mountains that remained were covered with the vicious scars of battle. All of this had been caused by the shockwaves generated from the earlier clashes. It must be remembered that this was a planet the Sithe had created and placed within the Stone Hellephant Wall. This planet was extremely stable and sturdy, but the shockwaves from this battle alone had been enough to annihilate most of the nearby mountains. This was more than enough to terrify Tianello and the others.

“Those two Daolords actually won. They actually won. They beat the three great clans.” Tianello, Maji, and the others could hardly believe it.

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“Ahaha, we actually acquired three Emperor-class golems.” Ninedust

said delightedly, "How absolutely wonderful. I hope they send a few more over for us to capture."

"Don't get cocky." Ning had a serious look on his face. "Even though I had my heartworld projection and my nine novessence arts active, the restrictive effected generated by just three of those golems was enough to drop me to 70% of my maximum power. I doubt the three great clans sent their full forces against us. If they were able to drop me to 40% of my full power, things will get dangerous."

"Agreed." Startled, Ninedust immediately nodded. "How strong are these three great clans, exactly?"

"I'm not sure." Ning shook his head, then grinned. "But those three golems should know."

"The three golems?" Ninedust's eyes lit up.

"We need to bind them immediately and have them spill the secrets they know regarding the three great clans," Ning said. "Only when you understand both yourself and your enemy shall you be the victor in all your battles! Based on what I can see thus far, the three great clans are much more powerful than we had predicted."

"Agreed." And so, Ning and Ninedust immediately began to bind the three captured golems to themselves.

Chapter 16: The Three Great Clans

Deep within the subterranean underground of this world. The three silver men were once again standing by the bubbling lake of lava, but they were no longer as calm as they were before this.

“This Daolord Darknorth not only managed to defeat six Emperor-class golems by himself, he actually captured three of them.” The muscular silver man said seriously, “This level of power has completely surpassed that of any ‘supreme Daolord’ we have ever heard of. Something like this has never happened since our three great clans have started our joint rule over this planet.”

“Yes. Even though a few supreme Daolords arise from time to time, all of them were completely crushed when facing six Emperor-class golems.” The silver-haired man’s eyes were filled with murder. “This Daolord Darknorth is definitely the most powerful Daolord our three clans have ever encountered.”

“One on six, he managed to capture three Emperor-class golems...” The skinny silver man shook his head as well.

This man was powerful, more powerful than any ‘Daolord’ should be. Still... this was what they believed because their horizons were limited. In the Endless Territories, a vast horde of Daolords would arise every era of 108,000 chaos cycles, and there were occasionally one or two who were able to completely eclipse all other Daolords. In this era, those two were Winesage and Ji Ning.

“It seems we have to personally intervene if we wish to defeat Daolord Darknorth.” The skinny silver man’s eyes were filled with the desire to do battle. “How about this? I’ll spar against this Daolord Darknorth first. If I’m able to kill him by myself, I will. If I’m not, you two can join in.”

“We can’t be the slightest bit overconfident against a foe like this. Let’s use our full power immediately,” the silver-haired man said.

“Agreed. We need to go to maximum power immediately. This Daolord Darknorth was actually able to defeat six Emperor-class golems... that

means he is already on our level,” the muscular silver man said. “We have to completely overwhelm and crush him in order to kill him. Not only should all three of us work together, all of the Emperor-class golems in our three clans which possess invulnerable forms should be activated as well.”

“What?”

“We’re going to activate all our golems with invulnerable forms?” The other two silver men were shocked by this. Any of the three were capable of fighting Darknorth; for all three to work together was already an incredible show of power. Were they really going to send an group of Emperor-class golems as well?”

“If we’re going to go at him full-force, then let’s make sure he has no chance at all,” the muscular silver man said. “Daolord Darknorth is the most powerful enemy our three great clans have ever encountered in our history. Thus... let’s give him the respect he deserves. All three clan leaders and all invulnerable Emperor-class golems are going to attack simultaneously. Hmph. He should be proud, even in death.”

“Agreed.”

“To die to such a force is indeed prideworthy.” The other two both laughed.

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“On my orders, activate all 156 clan-guarding formations and activate the Sithe disc. Be on maximum alert.”

“On my orders, activate all 180 formations and activate the Sithe disc.”

“Everyone is to be on maximum alert. Activate all formations and activate the Sithe disc.” The three clan leaders send orders to their clans. Their first goal was to protect and ensure the safety of their clans. If their clans were doomed, their own survival wouldn’t matter. After having undergone the Ritual Sacrificium they were no longer real ‘cultivators’ and were unable to have any progeny of their own. Thus, if the other members of the clan all perished it would represent the true and final destruction of

their lineage... and once they reached their lifespan limits they would die as well.

Thus, the protection of the clan superseded everything.

“What’s going on?”

“All clan-protecting formations have been activated? Even the Sithe disc is being activated? I’ve never heard of the clan entering such a state of readiness.”

“Is the Daolord Darknorth who just challenged our three great clans truly that powerful?”

All three clans were thrown into a state of confusion, with the elites and high-level members of the clans feeling rather stunned. This was definitely the highest possible level of vigilance the three clans had ever activated!

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Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!!! A total of eleven figures shot through the skies, with the three silver men at the head. Behind them were a series of Emperor-class golems that all looked different, including the mist golem, fire golem, and lightning golem which had attacked Ning earlier. These eight Emperor-class golems were all of the invulnerable golems which the three great clans possessed.

“Daolord Darknorth’s sword-arts are inscrutable and mysterious, and he’s skilled at capturing golems. However, this time we’ve only brought golems with invulnerable forms with us; he won’t have a chance to capture them at all,” the skinny silver man said with a cold smile. “Eight Emperor-class golems and the three of us... hmph!”

“He’s going to be absolutely demolished.”

“After undergoing the Ritual Sacrificium, the three of us have become true members of the Sithe race and gained incredible power. Even though we are the lowliest, most ordinary members of the Sithe race, we’re still far beyond these Emperor-class golems in power. Any of us three can fight Daolord Darknorth on equal footing and perhaps even kill him.”

The three silver men were extremely confident in their chances. They had no equals in this world and so they only sparred against each other and the Emperor-class golems. As a result, they knew that any of them would be capable of easily defeating six Emperor-class golems.

They represented the true apex of combat power in this world.

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The Cranesoar Mountains had long ago been reduced to rubble. The battle between Ning, Ninedust, and the six original Emperor-class golems had completely annihilated the area.

Atop the rubble was a temporal acceleration cabin. Within the cabin, Ning and Ninedust were busy binding the golems while accelerating the flow of time. Binding Emperor-class golems was no easy task, and they had no time to waste. Ning and Ninedust both knew that the next attack from the three great clans would come quite soon, and so they had to immediately work to learn more about the three great clans and thus prepare accordingly.

The three Emperor-class golems were all comparable to supreme Daolords. Fortunately, Ning and Ninedust were both strong enough to bind them by force.

“Success.” Ning was the first to take command over an Emperor-class golem. A look of respect instantly appeared in the green eyes of the six-armed stone golem. “Master.”

“You successfully bound one?” Ninedust turned to glance at Ning. He himself was still busy using all his power to try and bind his.

“Hah! I was faster than you,” Ning grinned, then began to work on the swordsman golem. “I have some questions for you.” Although Ning’s full energy was focused on binding the swordsman golem, this wasn’t too mentally taxing and so he began to question the stone golem. “How strong are the three great clans, exactly? How much hidden power do they have?”

“Master,” the stone golem said respectfully, “All Emperor-class golems had their memories of life prior to joining the three great clans completely

wiped! Or to be precise... the previous golem-spirits were eradicated while our souls were slowly nurtured and strengthened by the three great clans. Thus, we don't know much about their most important secrets. Over the course of countless years, however, we have learned a few things based on our observations."

"Speak," Ning urged. These Emperor-class golems had simply been living with the three great clans for far too long; no one in the clans themselves had been alive for as long as they had! Although some of the most important clan secrets would never be divulged, a few traces would inevitably spill out over the course of many years.

"Long, long ago, this world was in a state of chaos before the three great clans had risen," the stone golem began, "But then three people who referred to themselves as 'Sithe' established three mighty clans. They managed to capture one or two Emperor-class golems from a secret place, then wiped out the original golem-spirits..."

"In each generation, the strongest members of the three great clans have always been those three clan leaders. Each time, they start off as normal cultivators, but once they become clan leaders they will be transformed into silver men who will gain inconceivable power," the stone golem said. "And every so often, the three great clans are able to capture another Emperor-class golem or two from that secret place."

"Thus... over the course of countless years, every single one of the three great clans has gained a total of at least five Emperor-class golems. Emperor-class golems are what the three great clans usually use to tame their foes! But their greatest power lies in the clan leaders themselves. The clan leaders are all incredibly powerful, and each one of them is on par with you, Master," the stone golem said.

Ning turned pale when he heard this. "All three of the clan leaders are able to defeat six Emperor-class golems by themselves?"

"Yes!" The stone golem replied, "They often spar against us and so we know how powerful the clan leaders are."

Ning felt a sense of shock upon hearing this. Judging from the sound of

things, the three clan leaders were what truly gave the three clans power! The successive generations of clan leaders would occasionally enter that mysterious place to capture a few Emperor-class golems, allowing them to build up quite a stockpile over the course of many years.

Since this mysterious place held Emperor-class golems within it, Ning suspected that it probably held the secrets of the Sithe within it.

“And where is this secret place?” Ning asked.

“I don’t know. Although we were all captured from that place, our original golem-spirits were all wiped out,” the stone golem said.

Ning nodded slowly. They really were being quite careful, wanting to ensure that no information leaked out.

Time continued to pass, one minute at a time. Ninedust managed to bind the eight-armed golem as well, while Ning completed the binding of the swordsman golem. The information they gained from these two golems was essentially the same.

Whoosh. Ning put away the temporal acceleration cabin. He stood next to Ninedust, the three Emperor-class golems behind them.

“Here they come.” Ning stared towards the distant skies, where eleven streaks of light were flying towards them. Leading the group was indeed a trio of silver men.

Chapter 17: The Silver Men

The three silver men all had very distinct auras. They weren't like actual living beings; rather, they seemed almost like golems. Their entire bodies were composed of silver, and Ji Ning couldn't help but feel as though he was looking at that onyx humanoid creature he had encountered in that cave within the Terror Starsea! That onyx humanoid had been 540,000 meters tall and pitch-black in color, and it had a giant hole in its chest which Ning and Ninedust had flown out of.

"These three silver men make me think of that onyx humanoid we encountered previously," Ning mused. "However, there's an enormous difference in the aura of power. The onyx humanoid had been able to slay a Hegemon on the spot and critically injure a second one, causing the second one to die later on. It was far, far more powerful than these silver men."

"Darknorth." The nearby Ninedust had a solemn look on his face as well as he sent mentally, "Those three silver men remind me of that black creature we found in the cave."

"Yes, they are quite similar," Ning sent back. "It seems these three clans truly do have a deep connection to the Sithe."

"They should be significantly more powerful than us. What should we do?" Ninedust asked.

"Let's follow the first plan for now," Ning said.

Boom! His awesome heartforce projection came crashing down, bringing with it its illusory mountains, rivers, and the dazzling sword mountain in the center! The giant heartworld projection pressed down furiously against the three silver men and the eight Emperor-class golems, causing the eight golems to instantly slow down. The three silver men, however, were still able to move at a hundred times the speed of light.

"The three of them weren't slowed down at all by the pressure of my heartworld projection?" Ning was secretly shocked. "Then take this as well!" Ning willed nine energy dragons to come thundering out of his

body, coiling around each other.

In truth, Ninedust's Ripplewater art was incredibly powerful as well, especially now that Ninedust had reached an even higher level of expertise. Given his mastery of the Dao of Water, his Ripplewater art was on the same level as Ning's nine novessence arts. However, there was no way for him to 'fold' it over Ning's arts; if they tried, they would interfere with each other.

Boom! The nine energy dragons swept outwards. The three silver men could feel the pressure, but they were still able to maintain a speed of a hundred times the speed of light. The eight Emperor-class golems behind them, however, slowed down dramatically. They were now able to move at less than fifty times the speed of light; just flying through the skies was quite difficult for them.

"The eight of you should join forces," the silver man who was the leader of the Fumo clan said.

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged."

"Acknowledged." The eight Emperor-class golems were looking rather bedraggled, but they immediately transformed into streaks of energy that formed a five-colored rope and a tri-colored rope! For five Emperor-class golems to work together perfectly was the apex of coordination possible for them. The five-colored rope was extremely powerful in particular. Still, with the heartworld projection and the nine novessence arts weighing down on the two ropes, they still flew quite slowly. They held back the entire squad as a result.

"Are the three of you sure that you wish to take on such a dangerous task? I don't want you to be taken away right after I spent all that effort binding you," Ning sent mentally to the three Emperor-class golems behind him.

"Don't worry, Master. We can hold on," the swordsman golem said.

"Ninedust, if the situation looks grim you should immediately take the

three away. Emperor-class golems aren't easily acquired, after all," Ning said.

"Leave it to me." Ninedust nodded.

Ning immediately manifested three heads and six arms. Six Northbow swords in hand, he immediately disappeared without a trace.

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The three silver men flying through the skies were shocked by this.

"He suddenly vanished?"

"Daolord Darknorth just vanished." The three of them discovered, to their amazement, that they couldn't find any trace of Ning at all.

Ning was able to use his Shadowless evasion art to its full potential within the domain of his heartworld projection and his nine novessence arts.

"Careful. This Daolord Darknorth is even more powerful than we expected. He didn't use this strange evasion art earlier," the muscular silver man sent mentally in a serious voice. The other two clan leaders grew cautious as well. Although they remained extremely confident in their abilities, the fact that they couldn't find any trace of Ning caused them to feel a headache oncoming.

"Hurry over here. Let's force him to reveal himself," the silver-haired man sent mentally to the eight Emperor-class golems.

"Acknowledged." Whoosh! Instantly, the five-colored rope began to expand dramatically in size. Much like how Ninedust was able to transform into a sea-sized wave, the five-colored rope was able to transform into a five-colored ocean. With expanded size came lessened power, but only by covering enough of the surrounding area would they be able to force Daolord Darknorth to reveal himself.

Rumble... the five-colored sea furiously spread outwards to cover a million, ten million, a hundred million kilometers. It continuously expanded, quickly covering the area around the three silver men.

“Hmph.” A cold snort rang out as a white-robed youth showed himself. He had three heads, six arms, and wielded six Northbow swords in his hands. His figure looked like a sword as he used the Blood Drop evasion art, tearing through the five-colored ocean as he shot towards the nearest silver man, the skinny one.

“Right on cue.” The silver man revealed an excited look as he readied the silver spikes in his two hands.

Swish! Swish! The spikes released ear-piercing screeches as they stabbed towards Ning in an almost dreamlike manner.

“Sithe, eh?” Ning was filled with the intent to do battle. His six Northbow swords transformed into six streaks of mist-formed sword energy as he began to launch a furious assault against the silver men.

Clank! The mist-formed sword clashed directly against the sharp spike, the terrifying collision generating rippling shockwaves that could be seen with the naked eye and which spread out in every direction. A giant crater was blasted into the land beneath it, while the few remaining parts of the Cranesoar Mountains were smashed into dust by the shockwave.

As for the distant Tianello and Maji, they and the other cultivators who were watching were completely stunned.

“Utterly terrifying.”

“This is t-t-terrif... is this the true power of the three great clans? So they had forces even more powerful than those Emperor-class golems!”

“Is this the power of the one named Daolord Darknorth?”

All of them felt stunned. They had already been amazed by how Ning had been able to defeat the six Emperor-class golems by himself, but that extended battle had only resulted in the partial destruction of the Cranesoar Mountains. In this battle between Ning and the three clan leaders, however, the very first exchange of blows had already completely destroyed what remained of the mountains. Even the ground around the mountain had begun to crack into a spiderweb of crevices!

This show of force was enough to terrify anyone. Even Daolords of the

Fourth Step who dared to move in closer would be instantly annihilated.

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In truth, others on this world aside from Tianello and Maji were paying attention to this battle! Ning's direct challenge to the three great clans had drawn quite a bit of attention, especially after he had defeated the first six Emperor-class golems that had been sent against him. This had stunned every clan in the world, causing all of them to hasten to the mountains and watch what would happen next.

"So this is the true power of the three great clans!" The other six 'great clans' and the weaker clans were all stunned as they watched from afar. They felt completely breathless. There was no way at all for them to fight back against the overwhelming power of the three great clans.

In their heart of hearts, many of them had dreamed of one day defeating the three great clans and becoming the rulers of this world... but now, they felt a sense of complete powerlessness. The difference in power was simply too vast!

"That Daolord Darknorth is ridiculously strong as well." They were amazed by the power of the three great clans, but they were also stunned by the strength of Daolord Darknorth. Daolord Darknorth was so strong that he was able to easily annihilate any of the clans in this world, aside from the three principal clans.

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Ning and the skinny silver man began to furiously battle against each other, and the terrifying shockwaves generated by their blows blasted out in every direction.

"What incredible power... but what a low level of insight!" Ning and the skinny silver man exchanged over a hundred blows in that brief instant but only fought to a standstill.

In strength alone, Ning's opponent was actually quite a bit stronger than him; Ning was only able to match him through usage of the Heavenbreaker stance. In terms of speed, the silver man moved at a

hundred times the speed of light! Even with Ning's nine novessence arts and heartworld projection active, the silver man was still able to maintain this speed. This was because the man was simply too powerful; he was completely capable of resisting the pressure and maintaining this level of speed.

However... the silver man's level of insight into the Dao was just too low! Ning felt that it was perhaps weaker than that of many second-tier Daolords. It was perhaps just barely on par with the likes of Patriarch Clearwind!

It must be understood that for cultivators who made it into the higher ranks, their power generally stemmed from their mastery of the Dao. Ning had an incredibly high level of insight into the Dao, the [Heartsword] art, and the Northbow swords... that was why he possessed such power! The silver men had a much lower level of insight into the Dao, but they were much like golems; their speed and strength were incredible, allowing them to fight Ning to a standstill.

"He has an overwhelming amount of power but is only able to put a fraction of it to good use. If I had such speed and strength, I'd be able to take down ten of them." Ning couldn't help but sigh. "No wonder those three Emperor-class golems we just bound said that so long as Ninedust helps them out while they are working together, they won't be captured.

Chapter 18: All Abilities Unleashed

Ji Ning had been able to easily capture the Emperor-class golems because he had a high level of insight into the Dao. His Shadowless stance was completely unpredictable, while his Blood Drop stance was incredibly fast, making it hard for the golems to defend against them.

As for the silver men? Although they were strong and fast, their strikes were too direct and clumsy! Although these clumsy strikes were very forceful, it wasn't too hard to block them; at most, you would be knocked flying from the power. In a one-on-one fight, they might be able to capture an Emperor-class golem, but all three of them were working together and were being assisted by Ninedust and Ning. It was highly unlikely that any of them would be recaptured.

"I'm clearly stronger than him, but I'm unable to dominate him." The skinny silver man sent mentally, "Hurry over here. Surround him and kill him."

"Coming."

"Let's go." The other two silver men charged forwards as well.

Surrounded by the five-colored sea of energy, Ning was weakened and only able to unleash 80% of his full power! Despite that, his high level of insight into the Dao allowed him to fight the skinny silver man to a standstill.

"Attack!" The muscular silver man wielded two silver warhammers while the silver-haired man wielded a pair of long silver sabers. All three of the silver men began to surround and furiously attack Ning.

"Die."

"Die!"

"He's dead meat." The three silver men were brimming with killing intent. At the same time, the tri-colored rope snaked over towards Ning as well. However, the three Emperor-class golems and Ninedust immediately transformed into streaks of light that shot towards the tri-colored ropes.

“Your opponent is us!” Ninedust transformed into a vast wave that wrapped itself around the tri-colored rope, while the three Emperor-class golems launched repeated attacks that caused the tri-colored rope to break apart, reform, and break apart again repeatedly.

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The tri-colored rope had been tied down by Ninedust and the three Emperor-class golems.

The five-colored rope had transformed into a five-color sea that was weakening Ning.

The three silver men were attacking Ning at the same time.

This was an utterly apocalyptic battle! Massive shockwaves blasted the surrounding area repeatedly. The nearby mountains had long ago been annihilated, while the earth itself had caved in. The other six great clans and the standard clans who were watching from afar were in a state of shock. This was a battle that engendered both admiration and despair in their hearts. They weren't even close to being able to fight against foes like this.

“Ahaha! You are too weak. You clearly possess tremendous power, but you are only able to put a fraction of it to good use.” Ning was in his three-headed, six-armed form as he fought against the three by himself, but he wasn't at any disadvantage at all.

“How can this be?”

“How is this possible? Why can't we even suppress or dominate him?”

“How can he be this strong?” The three silver men were all stunned. Just one of them was enough to fight Ning to a standstill... so why was it that all three of them working together were only achieving the same effect?!

This was because when Ning was fighting against the six Emperor-class golems and the skinny silver man, his strategy was to fight them head-on and meet them attack for attack! Now that three silver men were fighting him at the same time, Ning primarily relied on his defensive sword-arts and only launched the occasional attack. His Soleheart stance and his Yin-

Yang stance were simply too powerful, especially after the Northbow swords had absorbed all of that frozen ninesong pith. His defensive sword-arts had reached an incredible level of prowess.

Ning's defensive sword-arts were so perfect that he would be able to hold out against anything save for an utterly overwhelmingly superior level of power. Given how clumsy these silver men's attacks were and how low a level of insight into the Dao they had, Ning found it very easy to defend against them.

"Forget about three; I'd probably be able to defend against six of these silver men," Ning mused.

"Take rope form and bind him!" the muscular silver Fumo clan leader sent mentally to the five-colored sea. Instantly, the five-colored sea began to rapidly shrink in size. It once more transformed into the five-colored rope and coiled towards Ning.

"Rope?" Ning immediately moved. Whoosh! The five-colored rope was only able to move at less than fifty times the speed of light due to the heartworld projection and the nine novessence arts, while Ning was able to move much faster. He was able to effortlessly dodge the five-colored rope and immediately used his Shadowless evasion art to disappear without a trace.

"Damn."

"Once our golems take rope form and shrink in size, Daolord Darknorth is able to easily avoid it." The three silver men were beginning to grow anxious. Ning was no fool; he wasn't just going to stand there like an idiot and allow the five-colored rope to bind him. The reason why he had done so against the tri-colored rope in his first battle against the six golems was because he was so completely sure in his chances that he didn't even want to bother with dodging, instead choosing to exchange attacks. Now, however, Ning didn't dare to act with such arrogance.

"Golems, maintain a size of ten million kilometers," the silver-haired man was forced to order.

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At a size of ten million kilometers, the combined attacks of the three silver men ensured that there was nowhere for Ning to run. This size was enough to keep Ning at just 70% of his maximum power.

“There’s just nothing we can do to him.” The three silver men furiously assaulted Ning, but even at 70% power Ning’s defenses were airtight, even though he was now forced to completely focus on defense and was only able to launch the occasional attack.

Even if another silver man came, Ning would still be able to hold on.

“Nonti clan leader and Juwah clan leader, the three of us have done everything we can. This Daolord Darknorth’s defensive sword-arts are even more formidable than his offensive sword-arts. There is nothing we can do to him,” the muscular silver man sent mentally. “The three of us and these golems are completely unable to kill him. There’s nothing else we can do.”

“Yes, we’re out of other options.”

“I really didn’t want to do this... but we’ll have to use it.”

The three silver men exchanged a glance. This Daolord Darknorth was the most dangerous disaster to ever befall their three great clans! All three of them were on par with him, but even working together with the assistance of the five-colored rope they were still unable to do anything to him. Their failure to kill him was already shaking their control over this world. They absolutely could not permit this to continue.

“Die.” The muscular silver man produced a deep-blue oval treasure that was covered with layers of wriggling runes.

“Daolord Darknorth, you should feel proud to die to this Sithe treasure.” The skinny silver man produced an ancient banner that was blood-red and covered with a strange, evil-looking beast diagram.

“Die.” The silver-haired man took out a black bottle.

Ning immediately felt a sense of danger. “Not good. Come forth!” Ning produced a snow-white lotus flower in his hands. The lotus instantly bloomed, with Ning standing at the very center. The layers of lotus leaves

which appeared around Ning began to swivel, while Ning was within the bud at the very center which was completely covered by the first layer of petals. Ning was able to see through the semi-translucent petals and sense what was happening outside.

It must be remembered that Ning and Ninedust had acquired Winesage's vast hoard of treasures as well as the treasures owned by Timedream, Kingfreak, and numerous second-tier Daolords. Some of the weaker ones that weren't very useful, he had left behind for the Three Realms or to Su Youji and the others, but the useful ones he had kept on him. This one was one of the three most supreme defensive treasures in Ning's possession.

Screeeech! The layers of wriggly runes on the deep blue oval disc in the hands of the muscular silver man suddenly began to light up, emanating an ear-piercing screech as they did so. At the same time, a light blue sonic wave burst forth from the treasure and shot towards Ning.

The light blue sonic wave easily pierced straight through the snow-white lotus; the lotus wasn't able to defend against it at all. Ning struck out with his sword, but it didn't make any contact with the sonic wave at all.

Rumble...

The sound dove into his body, smashing straight against Ning's soul and truesoul. Ning's truesoul and soul were protected by the azureflower mist energy; although both trembled slightly, they didn't suffer any harm at all and managed to endure the hit head-on.

"What a strange attack. It struck at the soul and truesoul?" Ning was secretly stunned. He stared intently at his foes.

Whooosh. The attacks from the other two silver men arrived as well. The black bottle had already shattered, a black flame erupting from it which quickly 'glued' itself over the snow-white lotus flower. Hissing crackles could be heard as the snow-white flower immediately began to tremble, but then the lotus began to swivel once more. Although the black fire which had been 'pasted' on the petals were enough to cause them to tremble, the other petals helped spread the pressure and thus the flower

withstood the attack.

Finally, the power of the black flames was completely used up. The snow-white lotus flower had dimmed considerably as well and was rather wobbly.

The strange beast depicted on the ancient blood banner suddenly let out a furious bellow. Boom! A blood-red beast came flying out from the banner, which evaporated in its wake. The blood-red beast's eyes gleamed with brutal, murderous red light. It seemed to represent the incarnation of slaughter itself as it charged straight towards the snow-white lotus.

Boom! The snow-white lotus continued to swivel as it strove to hold on, but in the end it was still broken apart. After shattering the lotus, the blood-red beast charged straight towards Ning.

"Hmph." Ning no longer sensed much danger, and so he struck out with his sword to defend. Boom! A terrifying explosion rang out.

The blood-red beast repeatedly struck out with its sharp claws while Ning used his swords to defend. In the end, Ning was able to survive thanks to his powerful defensive sword-arts, with the Hegemon armor also having helped him endure the many blows.

"AWOOO!" The blood-red beast grew dimmer and dimmer, first turning an ordinary red, then turning pink. Finally, it unhappily raised its head to let out a resentful howl before completely vanishing.

Ning landed on the ground, a hint of blood on the corner of his lips. He glanced at the three silver men in the distance, looks of shock on their faces.

"Come, let's do that again," Ning growled. "Let's see if you have more treasures or if I have more treasures." As Ning spoke he waved his hand and caused one treasure after another to appear in front of him, not suppressing their auras in the slightest.

"B-but..." The three silver men exchanged glances. They weren't able to beat Darknorth in a straight fight. Now, it seemed as though Daolord Darknorth had quite a few treasures of his own. Every single treasure they

possessed had been laboriously acquired from that secret place and had been left behind by the Sithe. There were very few of them, and each one they used up represented a permanent loss.

“What should we do?” The three silver men felt rather lost. They suddenly realized that there was nothing at all they could do to this Daolord Darknorth.

Chapter 19: Darknorth Palace

“Haha, treasures? We brothers have plenty of’m!” Ninedust had transformed into a vast wave, but he now manifested his upper body and sent out one powerful treasure after another to appear in front of him. The Daolords of this world didn’t have that many treasures, but Ninedust and Ji Ning came from the Endless Territories. As a result, they had quite a few.

“What?!” The three silver men saw the many treasures hovering in front of the distant Ninedust and could sense the terrifying ripples of power emanating from them.

“Even the weaker Daolord has that many treasures on him?”

“Where the hell did they find so many treasures? Isn’t the secret location accessible to our three clans alone? We’ve completely searched through every corner of this entire world; the only place with many treasures secreted within it is that secret place. The other places shouldn’t have that many treasures. Where did these two Daolords find so many?”

The three silver men were extremely anxious. They exchanged glances at each other. “Fall back for now,” the muscular silver man commanded. Whoosh. Whoosh. The five-colored rope and the tri-colored rope began to retreat, moving towards the three silver men.

Ninedust and the three golems flew towards Ning. The two sides stared at each other from afar.

“If you want to fight, let’s fight,” Ninedust called out loudly. “What’s the point of just standing there blankly? It’s gonna be a war of attrition via treasures, right? Come on! You use one, I use one... let’s see who has more. I want to see if you end up dead or if we end up dead!”

“Damn.” The three silver men were absolutely enraged. They were exalted figures who were the absolute rulers over this world. They have never been challenged and mocked like this before! They were enraged, but after this battle they realized that there was nothing they could do in battle to this Daolord Darknorth. His defenses were incredibly tough and

airtight, giving them no chance to win at all; if they wanted to win, they would have to use the treasures the Sithe had left behind. Unfortunately, they had extremely few of those treasures! Their treasures possessed great power... but it seemed as though these two Daolords also had quite a few treasures of similar power.

“If we really do compete against them in treasures, once we clean out their stockpile we might be able to kill... but what if we’re the ones who are cleaned out instead? What should we do?” the skinny silver man sent mentally.

“If we use up all the treasures, we won’t be able to pose any threat to Daolord Darknorth at all.” The silver-haired man sent back mentally, “By then, he’ll have nothing to fear at all and will become even more of a problem.”

“Agreed.”

The many treasures they had accumulated were the final cards they had to play. They weren’t willing to use them all up. If they did, they might win... but they might also lose! They weren’t willing to accept what losing would entail.

“Daolord Darknorth... let’s just wait and see who has the last laugh.” The muscular silver man let out a cold snort. “Let’s go.”

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! The three silver men led the eight Emperor-class golems soaring through the skies as they departed.

Ning watched from afar as they left, a hint of a smile playing around his lips.

“Darknorth, what should we do next?” Ninedust began to worry. “They are more powerful than us, after all. Your sword-arts are defensively strong enough to ensure they can’t do anything to us, but we can’t do anything to them either. If this stalemate continues, there’s no way we’ll be able to find the treasures hidden within this Stone Hellephant Wall.”

Ning nodded. The reason why they were fighting and risking their lives was to gain the treasures of the Sithe! Just from the Emperor-class golems

and the three silver men alone, both Ning and Ninedust felt absolutely certain that there was definitely a Sithe treasure trove here!

“Let’s establish ourselves in this world first,” Ning said. “Then we’ll search for that secret place.”

“That’s our only choice.” Ninedust nodded.

“Arise.” Ning turned to glance at the land behind him. The Cranesoar Mountains had been leveled long ago, but with but a thought Ning caused his heartworld projection to descend, using it to take control over the local earth and stones to establish a new, towering mountain that was ten thousand kilometers tall. At the very peak of the mountain, a top-grade Eternal estate descended in the form of an Immortal’s palace. At the very top of the palace gates, two characters could be seen: ‘DARK’ ‘NORTH’!

“I, Daolord Darknorth, on this day do establish the Darknorth Palace here. I do not seek hegemony; I only seek to cultivate the Dao. Those who stand in the way of my Dao shall end up like the mountains and rivers around the three great clans... destroyed!” Ning flew towards the entrance of the Darknorth Palace, sending his voice out to fill every single inch of this entire world. At the same time, he enveloped the entire planet with his heartworld projection, sending it smashing downwards towards the three great clans.

The three great clans were protected by layers of formations and barriers, but the surrounding mountains and rivers were instantly annihilated by the tremendous force of Ning’s heartworld projection, strong enough to slay even Daolords of the Fourth Step with ease. The area around the three great clans was instantly obliterated and rendered incredibly unsightly.

Everyone in the world from ordinary mortals to the three great clans all heard his voice.

“H-he actually dares to trample over our...” the silver-haired silver man’s face was ugly to behold.

“Damn him. Damn him!” The skinny silver man was enraged as well.

Ning was trampling over the three great clan's dignity, so as to establish his own power. This was a way for him to show that the Darknorth Palace didn't give a damn about the three great clans at all!

"He claims that he doesn't seek hegemony and only seeks to cultivate the Dao?" The muscular silver man sent puzzledly to the others, "If he only seeks to cultivate the Dao, why has he chosen to challenge our clans?"

"I think his true goal lies with that secret place of ours," the skinny silver man said with a cold smile.

"Yes, that has to be it." The silver-haired man's voice was equally cold. The secret place was what the three great clans relied upon and was for their use only. There was no way any other cultivators would be permitted to so much as find it. As they saw it, given how Daolord Darknorth already stood at the very apex of power in this world and had nothing to fear, he definitely was coveting their secret place.

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Ning's voice echoed throughout this entire world, with even mortal children able to hear it clearly. Everyone knew that this 'Daolord Darknorth' was incredibly powerful and had established a place known as the Darknorth Palace. He didn't even hold the three great clans in any regard at all.

"I can't believe this was the end result of it all."

"The three great clans are transcendent, supreme entities that have governed this world since time immemorial. The three clan leaders in particular are unfathomably powerful; supposedly, they are far more terrifying than even Emperor-class golems. They can cause hurricanes with a flick of their fingers that can annihilate even Daolords of the Fourth Step... but they actually weren't able to do anything to this Daolord Darknorth."

"He established Darknorth Palace... that means our world is no longer completely under the control of the three great clans."

“The heavens themselves are changing before our very eyes!”

.....

The many clans in this world all understood exactly what was happening... and just as they expected, the rise of Darknorth Palace really did symbolize that there were now two supreme powers within this world! This was now a bipolar world. On one side were the three great clans; on the other, Darknorth Palace.

The advantage of the three great clans lay in the fact that they had extremely deep resources and tremendous power. Darknorth Palace, however, had an advantage in that Ning's heartworld projection was able to instantly encompass this entire planet... in other words, if he wanted to attack, he had the power to annihilate everything outside the headquarters of the three great clans!

This power of absolute, instantly annihilation caused quite a few clans to fear Darknorth Palace even more. Some particularly ambitious clans chose to make a rather risky bet... they chose to submit to the rule of Darknorth Palace. Ning didn't refuse any comers.

“Haha, leave these matters to me. I used to command the Ninedust Sect; organizing and commanding these minor clans is simplicity itself.” Ninedust was quite eager to take on this task. “If we can't find the secret place ourselves, we might be able to learn some information about it from these clans.”

.....

Under Ninedust's leadership and with more and more clans joining their ranks, Darknorth Palace began to grow in power at an exponential rate. This was quite a troubling matter for the three great clans.

“We have no choice but to bear it for now. Those weaker clans are nothing; if and when we choose to attack, we can wipe them out with ease. Our greatest foe remains Daolord Darknorth.” The three clan leaders forebore from taking action.

“From this day forth, once our clans enter the secret place we need to

spare no expense in finding a treasure that can be used against Daolord Darknorth.”

.....

Time flowed on. In the blink of an eye, two thousand years passed after Ning had established Darknorth Palace in this world. He had continuously searched for the secret place this entire time, while Ninedust had coordinated the many clans under the banner of Darknorth Palace to do the same.

Nightfall. A cold wind was howling through the skies. Ning was seated atop a dais within Darknorth Palace, staring at the vast world before him as he trained in the [Heartsword] art.

“Palace Lord, the Hallmaster of the First Southern Hall has something important to report,” an attendant said respectfully.

“Something important?” Ning opened his eyes.

In recent years, Ninedust had divided Darknorth Palace up into many different branches, with the First Southern Hall being one of them.

“Have him come see me,” Ning instructed.

“Yes, Palace Lord.” The attendant immediately left.

A short while later, a black-armored man walked in, then fell to his knees and said respectfully, “Your subordinate greets you, Palace Lord.”

“You may rise. Speak. What is it?” Ning asked.

The black-armored man rose to his feet, a hint of eagerness in his eyes as he looked at Ning. It was Palace Lord Darknorth who was able to ensure that the three great clans were helpless against them, after all.

“Your subordinate has come into possession of certain information... and I think there is at least an 80% chance that it has to do with that secret place,” the black-armored man said respectfully.

Chapter 20: The Secret Place

“An 80% chance?” Ji Ning stared at the black-armored man. For a subordinate to dare claim an 80% chance of being correct meant that he was almost virtually certain; he had to factor in a bit of modesty, after all. “Go ahead and tell me.”

“Palace Lord, please take a look.” The black-armored man produced a scroll in his hands which he offered respectfully to Ning. Ning waved his hand, causing the scroll to fly over towards him.

Ning unfurled the scroll, which was covered with dense clusters of tiny characters. These were the last words of a free-spirited Daolord whose lifespan was coming to an end. It included some of his supreme legacies as well as the secrets he knew about.

“Eh?” Ning’s face tightened. “This Daolord actually entered the borders of a mysterious place by accident. He was almost discovered but thankfully was lucky enough to escape detection... and that place had an incredibly powerful garrison stationed there?” Ning nodded. This information the deceased Daolord had written down almost certainly referred to the secret place Ning was searching for! Aside from the three great clans, there were no other forces capable of stationing such a tremendously powerful garrison.

“So it is in a standalone dimension. No wonder my heartworld projection filled every inch of this planet but still was unable to find it.” Ning revealed a trace of a smile. He had finally found it. After two thousand years here on this planet, he had finally found information regarding the secret location.

It made sense. No matter how careful the three great clans were, a few traces would eventually slip through over the course of countless years.

“Excellent.” Ning looked at the black-armored man, then smiled. “You’ve done quite well, and I certainly need to reward you for your great accomplishment.” As Ning spoke, he waved a finger, sending a stream of light into the black-armored man’s body. The black-armored man

instantly felt his sea of consciousness tremble as an enormous amount of information began to flood into him.

Ning had taken many precious items away from Sectlord Timedream and the other Daolords, including good cultivation techniques. He casually chose a decent one which would guide this man to becoming a Daolord of the Fourth Step.

Once the black-armored man came back to his senses, he was so excited he immediately fell to his knees. "Thank you, Palace Lord."

The three great clans were so exalted precisely because they maintained an extremely strict level of control over their cultivation techniques. Lesser clans would never have access to the knowledge of the ancestors, and so they were forced to train blindly. This made becoming a Daolord extremely difficult, much less one capable of reaching the fourth step.

Now that he had this technique from Ning, not only would he become a Daolord, even his other clansmen would stand a good chance at it.

"Go," Ning instructed. When searching for information regarding the secret place, these subordinates had sworn lifeblood oaths in advance that they were only able to divulge this information to their superiors and not to any outsiders at all.

"Ninedust." Ning sat there atop the dais, staring into the dark night sky as he sent a mental message to Ninedust.

Whoosh. A figure manifested next to him. It was the Ninedust Sectlord. Ninedust said with some surprise, "It's past midnight. Why did you suddenly call for me? Want to grab a drink?"

"Take a look at this." Ning tossed the scroll to him.

Ninedust accepted it and gave it a read. A look of delight instantly appeared on his face. "Haha, we brothers have finally found this so-called 'secret place'! But from the looks of it, the three great clans guard it very tightly."

"The Daolord who wrote down this scroll only entered the outermost border regions by accident," Ning said. "I believe that the three great clans

must have set up layers of protective mechanisms and defenses; there's no way an outsider would be able to easily penetrate it."

"Agreed." Ninedust nodded. The secret place was most likely what allowed the three great clans to rise to prominence!

"I'm planning to head out tonight to inspect this location," Ning said. "I'll use the Shadowless evasion art and avoid discovery as best as I can! As for you, if you wish to join me you'll have to enter my estate-world treasure for now."

"Of course I'm going with you. The entire reason why I'm in this world is because I'm interested in the Sithe's local treasury," Ninedust said hurriedly. "Those three clan leaders are at a lower level of insight than me, but they are incredibly strong in battle and have all those Emperor-class golems... how could I give up a chance to acquire such a fortune?"

"Haha, I knew you'd come. Let's go." As Ning spoke, he sent mental messages to his four highest-ranking subordinates to temporarily take control over Darknorth Palace.

Swoosh. Swoosh. Ning and Ninedust quietly slipped away from Darknorth Palace that very night.

.....

Ning had scanned this world many times with his heartworld projection, and so he knew its geography very well! Now that he had that scroll, Ning was able to guess as to approximately where this place was located.

In the end, this planet was still a few billion kilometers in diameter. If Ning had been forced to search through every inch of it, ten million years wouldn't have been enough. This place was something which even a heartworld projection was unable to discover... even if he was just a meter away from it, he probably wouldn't be able to recognize it for what it was.

"There's a tree roughly nine meters thick. Once you touch it, you'll immediately be able to enter that secret place." After pulling Ninedust into his estate-world, Ning immediately activated the Shadowless evasion art.

Whoosh. Ning silently and soundlessly arrived in the rough location

mentioned by the Daolord. He quickly eliminated the more slender trees from consideration. He was looking for something at least nine meters thick... as Ning saw it, this so called tree which held the secret location within it probably wasn't an actual tree, just something disguised as one. It probably would never change in appearance.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Ning silently reached out to tap one tree after the other. His fingers were very gentle, ensuring that he generated no sound at all. He ended up spending two full days within the general region.

Tap. Ning casually tapped on the trunk of yet another large and leafy green tree in front of him... but his finger went straight through it. A sucking power was suddenly applied to his entire body as well. Ning was overjoyed and didn't seek to resist, allowing himself to be drawn inside of the great tree.

Space twisted and turned around him. He was surrounded by emptiness, with only a giant towering mountain in front of him. Ning had appeared at the base of the mountain.

"Eh?" Ning kept the Shadowless evasion art active as he carefully scanned his surroundings. "This massive mountain is actually hanging in empty space... was this done by the Sithe?" He was able to vaguely gaze through the void around him and see the forest outside. Clearly, outsiders weren't able to discover this place but those inside were able to see who was outside at any time. In fact, just a single step was needed to leave this place and return to the forest in the outside world.

"Hmph. The garrison stationed here really is powerful." Ning immediately saw a garrison stationed roughly a thousand kilometers away from him. This garrison had two Emperor-class golems, six Samsara Daolords, and a very large number of World-level cultivators. There was also a giant cave entrance halfway up the mountain which led deep into its heart.

The mountain cave was dark and unfathomably deep, and it was covered by layers of ancient formations that glowed with hazy light. When Ning saw the barriers, he felt a vague sense of danger from them.

“These barriers are meant to prevent people from going inside the mountain,” Ning mused “Most likely, the Sithe treasury is located within it.”

“The barriers protecting the three great clans were already quite strong. There’s no way this place isn’t just as well protected. I probably won’t be able to force my way through the barriers.” Ning knew this to be true; logically speaking, he shouldn’t be able to breach the barriers. The vague sense of danger he sensed from the barriers had already testified to that.

Forcing his way through wouldn’t work. It seemed that the only option was to play a few tricks.

“Eh?” Ning turned, his gaze falling upon an enormous tower-shaped formation next to the garrison. At his current level power, he was able to recognize it right away. “A spacetime transfer array? It seems so intricate and marvelous.”

“No wonder I kept watch over the three great clans for so many years without discovering how the three great clans entered this place. So this spacetime transfer array is directly linked to the headquarters of the three great clans.” Ning couldn’t help but shake his head. This world was a vast one; the chances of one stumbling upon this particular tree were incredibly low. Even if someone did enter, the garrison stationed here would be able to easily slaughter that person. In the event of failure, the barriers surrounding the mountain cave would prevent any entry.

However... time grinds away at all things. Eventually, there will be a leak. The Daolord who had left that scroll behind had been able to enter through a lucky streak of fortune, and he had immediately left carefully. He had only survived because his luck really was incredible.

“What should we do? How are we supposed to go inside? Going inside by force isn’t an option. It seems we will have no choice but to wait.” Ning stared at the spacetime transfer array, then secretly shook his head. “Yes, just wait.”

Waiting was a clumsy method, but sometimes the simplest methods were quite effective!

.....

“Darknorth, did you go inside yet?” Ninedust asked from within the estate-world. A white-robed incarnation of Ning appeared next to him.

“Don’t be impatient. I’ve already entered the secret area, but I’m in the outer regions of it. The entrance leading into the heart of this region has been blocked off by a barrier. It should’ve been the three great clans who set this barrier up; I really doubt I can breach it by force.” Ning shook his head. “Our only choice for now is to wait. Once the Daolords enter the heart of the region, I might be able to come up with a way to sneak through as well.

“They really are quite careful. They actually set up a formation of barriers inside the secret area’s passageways as well?” Ninedust was speechless.

Chapter 21: The Sithe Disk

Time continued to flow on. Ji Ning kept the Shadowless evasion art active the entire time and patiently waited outside for more than fifty thousand years. When it came to acquiring a Sithe treasury, he had patience in abundance.

Within the Nonti clan.

Creeaaak. A stone door swung open and a grim-faced Daolord of the Third Step walked out from within it.

“Daolord!” The armored soldier outside the door said respectfully, “The clan leader has send orders. All Daolords must immediately head to the ancestral grounds whenever they leave their secluded meditations.”

“Oh?” This Daolord of the Third Step, Daolord Joyquill, narrowed his eyes. “What’s with the urgency? Don’t you normally have to become a Daolord of the Fourth Step before being able to visit the ancestral grounds?”

“Daolord, the clan leader has now changed the rules. Even Daolords of the Second Step are allowed entry,” the armored soldier said hurriedly.

“Even Daolords of the Second Step are allowed in?” Daolord Joyquill was shocked. “How can this be? The ancestral grounds are incredibly dangerous. Success brings great rewards, but the weak will most likely perish. Although some Daolords of the Second Step have succeeded in the past, this is just too dangerous.”

“Daolord, you’ve been in secluded meditation for many years so you don’t know what has happened. Our three great clans have encountered a deadly opponent,” the armored soldier said. “Over fifty thousand years ago, a Daolord named Darknorth suddenly rose to power. His might was unmatched and he challenged our three clans all by himself. The Emperor-class golems we sent out were all defeated, with him capturing three of them. The three clan leaders then led a force of eight golems to attack him, but in the end they still weren’t able to subdue him.”

“What?!” Daolord Joyquill was astonished. “Impossible.”

“Daolord Darknorth then established the Darknorth Palace. By now, he is in control of quite a few clans. He has set himself up in opposition to our three clans!” The armored soldier continued, “The three clan leaders have already sent word that we are to charge deep into the ancestral grounds, regardless of the risk! We need to find as many treasures as we can from the ancestral lands, so that we can deal with Daolord Darknorth.”

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After gaining a more thorough understanding of what had happened recently, Daolord Joyquill felt even more stunned. He never would've imagined that the clan would've fallen into such dire straits during this session of secluded meditation.

Rumble... Daolord Joyquill stood there within a spacetime transfer array. He mumbled to himself with a frown as the array started to light up, “Where the hell did this Daolord Darknorth come from? How did he become this powerful?”

Whoosh. Space and time twisted around him. By the time everything was clear, he found himself within the ancestral lands.

“The ancestral lands.” Daolord Joyquill stared at the area around him. Next to him was a great garrison, while outside was the vast emptiness of space. Beyond even that was the great forest in the real world outside.

“Brother Joyquill.”

“Daolord Joyquill, you came as well?” The six Daolords stationed here walked out to welcome him.

“Yes.” Daolord Joyquill nodded. “I received the order right after I left my meditations and so I immediately came here.”

“Ugh. I wonder how Daolord Darknorth trained and how he became so powerful. All of the Daolords of the three great clans are now risking their lives inside.” The six Daolords in charge of the garrison sighed.

“Most of them will probably end up dead soon.”

“How could someone like Daolord Darknorth have suddenly emerged from those other lowly clans?”

They all shook their heads. They had grown accustomed to feeling superior to all others, and they didn't even hold the other six 'great clans' in any regard. As they saw it, all others who were not members of the three great clans were lowly figures. They were the absolute rulers of this world, and they had ruled it fearlessly since time immemorial. How could they not feel enraged at how Daolord Darknorth had suddenly shaken their positions?

However, they could do nothing but sigh and lament at his appearance. The difference in power between them was simply too great; they weren't capable of doing anything to him at all.

“I'll head on in,” Daolord Joyquill said.

“Be careful, brother Joyquill.”

“Hopefully, brother Joyquill will reap great rewards from this.” The six Daolords all said a few words of encouragement.

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Swoosh! A silent figure moved close towards Daolord Joyquill.

“Finally, a new Daolord has arrived. And, from the looks of things, he's about to enter the inner regions.” Ning watched as Daolord Joyquill moved towards the mountain cave. Ning quickly moved closer to Joyquill, with no one discovering his presence.

“Soulthral.” By now, even the Kingfreak would be affected by his soul-mesmerizing abilities, to say nothing of a weak Daolord of the Third Step like this. Joyquill was instantly swept into a state of unconsciousness.

While doing this, Ning set up a thirty meter barrier around them which warped and distorted light. If anyone glanced towards them, they would see Daolord Joyquill continuing to walk normally.

“Get in here.” Ning instantly drew Daolord Joyquill into his estate-world.

“And... here I go.” Ning appeared out of nowhere, but he now looked just like Daolord Joyquill. No... not just looked alike. Even his soul and truesoul were identical to Joyquill’s.

Ning immediately released the barrier around the surrounding area, then glanced around him before letting out a sigh of relief. The process of setting up the barrier, catching Daolord Joyquill, then replacing him had happened almost instantaneously, but if there was a Daolord specifically keeping a careful watch on this area then it would’ve still been possible for his actions to be noticed. Thankfully, he hadn’t been.

After having put away Daolord Joyquill, Ning immediately released a small amount of his energy into his estate-world to question the man. Alas, Daolord Joyquill had long ago sworn a lifeblood oath regarding this ‘secret place’; even though his soul had been mesmerized, he wasn’t able to say a thing.

Ning questioned Joyquill for quite some time but didn’t gain much from it. “There’s nothing for it.” He had no choice but to grit his teeth and walk forwards! Ning quickly reached the region covered by layers of barriers.

“Brother Joyquill, I’ve already taken control over the Sithe disk. You can come in,” a voice rang out from behind the layers of blue barriers of light.

The ‘Sithe disk’? Ning silently memorized this term. On the surface, he just nodded slightly as he continued forwards. Indeed, the layers of blue light were like curtains of water. Ning was able to easily walk in without the slightest disturbance at all. This barrier-filled region was tens of thousands of kilometers long, but Ning walked incredibly fast and was able to quickly bypass it.

“Daolord Joyquill has arrived.”

“It is Daolord Joyquill.”

The three Daolords in charge of the Sithe disk all laughed. They carefully inspected every person who came in, but they did so primarily through inspection of the truesoul aura. They weren’t worried about Daolord Joyquill secretly bringing anyone else inside, because every single Daolord of the three great clans had long ago sworn lengthy lifeblood oaths. The

part of the oath pertaining to the ancestral lands were particularly severe and exacting.

For example, even though Ning had used a soul-mesmerizing technique on the man, he still wasn't able to learn any secrets regarding this place!

"Daolord Joyquill." The three seated Daolords looked at him. One of them, an old man with a large beard, called out in a loud voice, "Be careful after you go inside. This place is filled with danger, and many of the golems are filled with enmity towards our clans. All of them are Emperor-class golems; if they manage to ambush you, you'll be doomed."

"Thank you." Ning nodded, many thoughts flashing through his mind. He absolutely had to acquire the Sithe treasury! However, it seemed as though there was only one way inside this mountain... and it had been protected by layers of barriers.

"If I wish to take the treasury for myself, I'll probably end up revealing myself! They will be able to use these barriers to ensure that I'm unable to leave." Ning stared at the three Daolords who were controlling the distant Sithe disk. "I won't feel secure unless and until I get rid of them first."

"Daolord Songfloat," Ning said while walking towards the three. As the lord of Darknorth Palace, he held a very high status and thus knew almost all of the Daolords within this world.

"What is it?" The bearded elder smiled as Ning walked towards him, completely unafraid.

Whoosh. Ning cracked a smile as well, sending an invisible wave of power towards them. Instantly, the three seated Daolords felt a wave of pressure come crashing down towards them, causing them to go dizzy. Their bodies slumped to the ground, powerless. Ning instantly moved to stand next to them, grabbing the strange disk which had been rotating around the three. The round disk was a deep brown color and covered with many extremely complex runes.

The ripples emanating from the disk spread out to cover tens of thousands of kilometers. The surrounding formations and barriers all had this Sithe disk as their core.

“Arise.” Ning reached out to take a firm grip over the round disk, clasping his hands around it. Rumble... instantly, the layers of formations and barriers for tens of thousands of kilometers around them began to rumble.

The guards stationed at the garrison outside the cave couldn't help but turn their heads to look backwards.

“What's going on?” Some of the Daolords stationed inside the mountain were able to sense the ripple as well.

“Not good.”

“That was the Sithe disk!” The three silver men immediately transformed into streaks of light that shot out from the mountain and charged towards Ning.

Ning had grabbed at the Sithe disk twice without being able to pull it to him. He immediately waved his hand and produced the Northbow sword, executing his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop. This was his most penetrating attack, and it was the best attack he had for disrupting formations. Slash! Slash! Slash! It was hard to defeat a formation from the outside, but breaking it through when you were already inside it was much easier.

One streak of mist-formed sword energy after another stabbed into the Sithe disk, causing some of the supportive formations to immediately break apart.

Rumble... Ning finally managed to dislodge the Sithe disk from its orbit, breaking it free from the many mysterious formation-runes that had been binding it. Ning then sent the Northbow sword in his hands to deliver furious chops towards the world around him, destroying all the formations one by one.

“Get in here.” When Ning saw the three silver men fly towards him, he immediately drew the Sithe disk into his estate-world.

Chapter 22: Ancestral Proscriptions

Only after putting away the Sithe disk did Ji Ning feel marginally at ease. Otherwise, the many barriers it served as the focal point for would've been very problematic for him. Even if he did acquire treasures from within the mountain, there would've been no way out for him.

"It's you!"

"Daolord Darknorth!"

"How were you able to disguise yourself as Joyquill? You even managed to emulate his truesoul's aura!"

The three silver men flew towards Ning. They had been shocked when they saw Daolord Joyquill seize the Sithe disk, but when they saw the Northbow sword appear in Ning's hand they immediately knew who he was. They certainly wouldn't believe that Daolord Joyquill had the power to seize a Northbow sword from Daolord Darknorth!

"Haha..." Ning laughed as he transformed back into his own appearance. "You found out too late," Ning said as he summoned his awe-inspiring heartworld projection to cover both this tunnel as well as the garrison outside. Even the inner depths of the mountain were completely covered by it... and as it descended, the other Daolords of the three great clans were stunned.

"What's going on?"

"W-w-what's happening?"

"Is this the legendary 'heartworld projection'? Could it be Daolord Darknorth?"

"This place is our ancestral grounds, a place hidden from all others and which is protected by the Sithe disk. How could the heartworld projection have invaded it?" They all began to panic.

Ning just frowned slightly. He could sense that although his heartworld projection covered an extremely large region, there was some sort of energy deep within the mountain which was able to resist and block his

heartworld projection, making it unable to penetrate any deeper.

“Soulthrall.” A wave of heartforce swept outwards. This was Ning’s soul-hypnosis technique, and it instantly struck all of the Daolords within the range of his heartworld projection. None of them were able to resist it at all! Even the Daolords of the Fourth Step were instantly drawn into a dazed state.

“What are you doing!” The three silver men were shocked and enraged.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” Ning looked back at the three silver men. “Don’t worry, I’m not planning to kill them. If I wanted to do so, I would’ve been able to easily eradicate them through my heartworld projection alone. I wouldn’t have gone to the trouble of putting them under my control instead...”

“You...!” The three silver men were enraged and anxious. The vast majority of the Daolords of their three clans were all located here! There were one or two standing guard over their clan, and a few had ventured so deep into the mountain that they weren’t covered by the heartworld projection. However, Ning had at least thirty-one Samsara Daolords under his control.

“Don’t worry. If you can agree to my requests, I’ll release all of them completely unharmed.” A cold light flashed through Ning’s eyes. “But if you refuse, then don’t blame me for what I’ll be forced to do.”

The three great clans viewed themselves as the absolute rulers of this world, believing all other living creatures to be beneath them. They viewed themselves as the ultimate arbiters of life and death for the others. This mentality was pervasive in the three great clans, shared by the clan leaders and clansmen alike. They had always believed this, and after becoming Samsara Daolords they had only become even more fearless and lawless. And in truth, they were indeed the rulers of this world. No one had ever been able to challenge or shake their authority! Only, the descent of Daolord Darknorth upon this world had shaken their status.

“Speak!” the muscular silver man commanded with a growl.

“Speak. Don’t ask for too much,” the silver-haired man said, teeth

clenched.

“My conditions are simple,” Ning said. “First, you are not permitted to attack me... but of course, I won’t do anything further to you either. We shall coexist peacefully. Second, you must tell me all the secrets you know pertaining to the Sithe, including everything you know about this mountain. If you agree to both conditions... we still won’t be friends, but at least we won’t be enemies any longer.”

The world of cultivators was a world of slaughter and strife. The three great clans were protected by many formations and barriers; there was no way for Ning to wipe them out at all. Even if he did, the only result would be a different organization would rise to rule over this world.

As a result, Ning couldn’t even be bothered to get into a real war against these people. His ultimate goal was to obtain the Sithe treasury! Once he did, he would immediately leave this place. There really was no need for him to become enemies with these three clan leaders. They were far too strong, after all; he wasn’t able to defeat any of them. Right now, he knew nothing about the depths of this mountain whatsoever. The three great clans, however, had spent countless aeons searching and exploring the place. They definitely knew a great deal about it.

His enemies knew a great deal regarding this mountain, while he knew nothing at all. His enemies were also stronger than him; if they wanted to scheme against him here, he would probably be in a great deal of danger.

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The three clan leaders exchanged glances as they secretly conversed mentally. Soon, they clenched their teeth and came to a decision.

“That’s a nice little fantasy you have.” The muscular silver man, the clan leader of the Fumo clan, growled out: “Daolord Darknorth, we aren’t able to accept your conditions due to our ancestral proscriptions. Every single member of the clan was long ago forced to swear lifeblood oaths regarding this.”

Ning’s face tightened. Ancestral proscriptions?

“But we’ll make it up to you in other ways.” The Fumo clan leader suppressed his rage as he spoke: “First, as you’ve requested, we agree to live in peace with you. Second, you must leave our ancestral lands. We will never allow anyone who is not a member of our three clans to enter this place. Third, we’ll give you a gift of three Emperor-class golems in compensation. In return, we wish to regain our clansmen.”

“How generous,” Ning said dryly. “Three Emperor-class golems.”

“Our three great clans have only acquired a few of these golems despite having spent countless eras scouring this place. To trade you three golems for the lives of our clansmen is a show of great sincerity,” the skinny silver man, the Juwah clan leader, said in a sharp and shrill voice.

“I agree that you are being quite sincere... but unfortunately, my goal is the Sithe treasury.” Ning shook his head. “Emperor-class golems? I really don’t care too much about them.”

His ultimate goal was a treasure that could intrigue even an Autarch; only then would he have a chance at reviving Yu Wei. He needed treasures on par with Crimsonwave Temple in value. Emperor-class golems weren’t even close! It must be remembered that the two overseers who had stood guard over Crimsonwave Temple were Hegemon-class figures!

“There is no way we’ll permit anyone outside of our three clans to enter the ancestral grounds,” the silver-haired man said in a cold voice.

“Absolutely not.” The muscular silver man’s voice was ice-cold as well. “I strongly recommend that you accept our conditions...”

“So I should go ahead and kill them?” Ning asked.

“Kill them.”

“Go ahead.”

“They are just Daolords; even if all of them died, we’d be able to raise a new generation of them in time.” The three silver men didn’t hesitate at all.

The ancestral grounds served as the foundation for the entire clan.

There was an enormous treasury here, and despite having spent countless years scouring the place they had only acquired a fraction of the treasures in the outermost layer. If Daolord Darknorth entered, he might find things that were even better than what they had acquired. He might've sworn an oath not to kill them, but his descendants might use those treasures to wipe out the three great clans.

Why were the three great clans so formidable? It was because of the three silver men, right? But the treasury held things that were even more terrifying and powerful than the silver men! If Ning acquired them, he would be able to establish a clan that was even more terrifyingly powerful than theirs.

"So I really should go ahead and kill them?" Ning's voice was cold as well. Swish! The Daolord who was located closest to the three clan leaders instantly had his truesoul snuffed out. His eyes turned completely blank and dead.

"You-!" The three clan leaders were instantly driven into a state of fury.

"The two of us will hold him back. You go and rescue as many of our clansmen as you can." The muscular silver man and the skinny silver man howled with rage as they charged towards Ning, while the silver-haired man turned to fly deep into the mountain, seeking to pull away the Daolords.

"Too late." A flicker of something baleful flashed through Ning's eyes. If their negotiations had fallen through... then so be it. Let them die. Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! One truesoul after another was extinguished by Ning's [Heartforce Eradicator]. Not a single person was able to withstand this attack.

In the blink of an eye, every single one of the Daolords had perished.

"Daolord Darknorth, you are dead meat!"

"Die, Darknorth! Die!" The two clan leaders went berserk. In the past, they had always been the ones to hold the power of life and death over others. There had never been a situation where so many Daolords of their clans had been instantly annihilated by others.

“Even all three of you working together weren’t able to do anything to me. What’s the point of even trying with two?” Ning manifested three heads and six arms as he drew his six Northbow swords. With his heartworld projection and his nine novessence arts swirling around him, he was able to defend against the attacks of the two clan leaders while moving deeper and deeper into the mountain. Although the two clan leaders managed to slow him down greatly, he was still able to move deeper within.

“Hm. The Nonti clan leader flew out of the range of my heartworld projection?” Ning frowned. His heartworld projection merely covered part of the mountain; deep within the mountain, there was some sort of unknown energy which was able to resist his heartworld projection. The third silver man had flown deeper into the mountain and outside of the range of Ning’s scans.

Chapter 23: Another Onyx Humanoid

The silver-haired Nonti clan leader ventured deep into the mountain by himself. When he flew beyond the range of the heartworld projection, he roared angrily, "All of you, come back! Come to me and stay away from the heartworld projection!"

"Understood."

"Coming."

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Five figures flew straight towards him, moving quite fast as they retreated from the depths of the mountain.

The silver-haired man looked at the five Daolords in front of him, sighing secretly to himself. These five were the only Daolords left of the many who had entered the ancestral grounds... and that was counting all three clans! Even if they factored in the ones standing guard over their clans, each clan now had just two or three Daolords left.

"What happened, clan leader?"

"What's going on with that heartworld projection?" They couldn't help but query him.

"It's Daolord Darknorth. He's already wiped out all of the other Daolords in the ancestral grounds." The silver-haired man's voice was cold as ice. "Enough, there's no time for questions. The other two clan leaders and I will join forces to kill him inside the ancestral grounds. Since he came here, he has only himself to blame for his death."

"Understood." The other five Daolords were shocked and enraged. They all ground their teeth and nodded, filled with hatred towards Daolord Darknorth and faith in their clan leader. This was because the ancestral grounds truly were terrifyingly dangerous.

The silver-haired man waved his hand, collecting all five of them. As of right now, the three great clans had almost no Daolords left; every single one of them was a precious resource.

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Ning continuously moved deeper and deeper into the mountain. Soon, the silver-haired man returned and joined forces with the other two clan leaders in attacking Ning. Alas, it was useless; they hadn't been able to do anything to Ning even when they had eight Emperor-class golems assisting them. Their chances were even slimmer now!

"They are more familiar with this place than me. I can't let them trick me." Ning was secretly on maximum alert as he slowly delved deeper into the mountain. Palaces and other buildings gradually began to appear within the mountains, a mixture of black and gold elegance. However, the buildings were all completely shattered and destroyed, with giant claw marks occasionally seen. It was as though a single sharp set of claws had been used to tear through these buildings.

"We saw these claw marks in the outer layer of the Stone Hellephant Wall as well," Ning mused. "It seems as though the same person fought his way all the way here. This should be the true core of the Stone Hellephant Wall."

Those elegant palaces had some treasures floating in the air above them. Although the treasures and the palaces had both been wrecked, they still emanated auras of incredible power.

The three clan leaders had originally been launching attacks nonstop against Ning. They gradually began to slow their attacks, but they continued to circle around him with smirks on their faces as they looked at him.

"We have visited the ancestral grounds countless times over the course of countless generations. This Daolord Darknorth truly is courting death, for him to dare barge into this place."

"We have to kill him as soon as we can. Once more time passes and he grows familiar with this place, it'll become much harder to scheme against him."

"Yes, let us kill him quickly." The three clan leaders secretly planned out their next stratagem, allowing Ning to advance as he pleased in the meantime. As for Ning, he remained vigilant; he wouldn't dare to be

overconfident here in a Sithe relic site!

Boom! Boom! Ning used his nine novessence arts to attack the surrounding area with wild abandon. If there were any traps here, he wanted to use his nine novessence arts to activate them at a distance!

Boom! Whoosh! Some barriers did indeed flare with power, but Ning's nine novessence arts had activated them from ten million kilometers away and so they didn't harm Ning in the slightest.

"Daolord Darknorth is being quite careful. By relying on his secret arts, he's able to avoid many dangerous places." The three clan leaders were so angry their teeth hurt.

"It's fine. Once he goes deeper inside, his heartworld projection and his secret arts will be useless," the skinny silver man said through clenched teeth.

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"What's this?" Ning suddenly saw a corpse that had been split in half. The corpse was so large, it was like a pair of mountains lay there amidst the palatial rubble.

He saw a pitch-black humanoid figure whose midsection had been sliced in half. Judging from how the wound had been torn open, the person had clearly been torn in half by a pair of sharp claws. Ning could even see the many countless stone passageways located deep within the body itself. He could immediately recognize that this bisected onyx humanoid was the same as the onyx humanoid he had seen in the Terror Starsea, the one which had caused the deaths of two Hegemons of the Endless Territories in the Dawn War. Their auras were absolutely identical and gave Ning the same sense of pressure and might.

"He was a-actually torn in half?" Ning was stunned. "This creature was capable of bringing down Hegemons with it! Even the Ancient Hegemon was only able to just barely pierce a hole through that onyx humanoid's chest... but this one was actually torn in half?"

Ning clearly remembered just how terrifyingly powerful the first one had

been. The golden sand from the planet within its body had been enough to cause his Northbow swords to evolve and transform!

Whoosh. Ning reached out to grab at the upper half of the black humanoid's corpse.

"Hmph." The three clan leaders circling around him didn't move to stop him. They just watched with cold smiles.

Ning felt like he was an ordinary mortal seeking to move a mountain; there was no way for him to budge the corpse in the slightest.

"This thing is dead; perhaps its core regions are damaged as well. Last time I encountered one of these things, my Northbow swords were able to drink from the golden sand to evolve. This corpse might have a similar effect on my swords." This was the thought that flashed through Ning's mind... but a heartbeat later, he understood that with the three clan leaders present, there was simply no way he'd be able to slowly upgrade his Northbow swords and let them feed.

"When I have a better opportunity, I should come back and explore the insides of this corpse." Ning continued his advance, leaving it behind.

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The vast, palatial ruins must have had many living creatures within it in the past, but all of that was gone now. Ning wasn't sure as to how many corpses had been destroyed and how many had been carted off by the three great clans. Perhaps the only immovable one was this onyx humanoid corpse.

After spending half a day, Ning finally reached the core regions of this enormous palace complex.

Rumble... a surge of unknown power was flowing through this place. It completely blocked off Ning's secret arts and heartworld projection, making it impossible for them to spread out.

"Eh?" Ning could vaguely see a few golems flickering around in front of him. Clearly, they had retreated into this place.

“The Emperor-class golems are all here?” Ning stared at the unknown power flowing through this area. He could sense, however, that the power was quite weak. He stared off into the distance, where a series of enormous pillars could be seen generating waves of power that fed this unknown energy. Many of the pillars had toppled or been destroyed, and many more were damaged as well. Only a tiny fraction were undamaged.

“They are of no threat to me. They shouldn’t be able to harm me.” After testing things out, Ning stepped straight into the region.

The three clan leaders exchanged a glance, then followed Ning in. They didn’t even attack Ning, just followed him from behind. As for Ning, he ignored them. There was no point in fighting them, as he was always on the defensive.

“This Daolord Darknorth is quite a cautious man.”

“All the caution in the world won’t do a damn thing for him.”

“He’ll be dying soon enough.” The three clan leaders continued to plot against Ning.

As for Ning himself, he carefully inspected the surrounding area. From the looks of it, this was once an enormous Sithe palace complex! The residences of the highest-ranking members should’ve been in the centermost area, and that was where the defenses should’ve been tightest. Only, everything along the way had been destroyed by that claw-attacking figure.

Soon, Ning reached the very center of this palace complex.

“What’s that?” Ning stared off into the distance, through a number of shattered walls. He was able to see a hill-sized onyx humanoid corpse lying slumped on the ground... in fact, Ning saw a total of three of them.

“Three more onyx humanoid corpses?” Ning was awestruck. This place was definitely an extremely important place for the Sithe!

Suddenly... swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!!! Four figures suddenly flew towards him at high speed from afar. Each of the four moved faster than a hundred times the speed of light, causing Ning to turn pale! It must be

remembered that the three clan leaders themselves merely moved at a hundred times the speed of light. Ning himself had yet to breach this limit! Even amongst Eternal Emperors, moving faster than a hundred times the speed of light was incredibly difficult.

However, the four figures attacking Ning had each surpassed this limit. Ning immediately sensed his subconscious screaming at him about the danger he was in. He understood that these four figures were far more powerful than the three clan leaders.

“Any outsiders who barge into Sithe lands shall be slain without exception!”

“Kill!”

“The three of you, help us stop this intruder!” The four figures called out commands as they flew towards Ning at high speeds.

“Yes, milords!” the three silver men called back. They had become members of the Sithe race after undergoing the Ritual Sacrificium and thus had been acknowledged by the Sithe; this was why they weren’t attacked.

“Kill!” One of the figures was completely gray in color, and he wielded a short spear in his hands. Swirls of gray light manifested at the tip of the spear as he arched his entire body backwards, then threw it forwards furiously.

Swoosh! The short spear shot through the air, moving far faster than the four figures themselves and carrying a terrifying level of power within it as it shot straight towards Ning. Ning instantly understood that if he allowed himself to be surrounded by these foes, he would definitely die.

Chapter 24: Invitation

“Here’s our chance.” The three clan leaders had been following Ji Ning this entire time, never letting him get too far away from them. Now, they all excitedly charged straight towards him.

“Slow him down.”

“If we can tie him down for a short period of time, he’ll be doomed.” The three clan leaders were filled with confidence, because it was quite easy for them to tie down Daolord Darknorth.

Boom! The short spear had already arrived in front of Ning. Ning produced a golden gem in his hand. The golden gem had strands of golden silk within it. He instantly crushed it, causing a wave of awesome power to spread out and cover his entire body as it was surrounded by layers of silken gold light. This was one of Ning’s life-preserving treasures, and it was designed to allow one’s speed to skyrocket!

“Die!” The skinny silver man shot straight towards Ning with his sharp spike in hand.

Whoosh. Ning moved in a ghostly manner, instantly skyrocketing beyond a hundred times the speed of light and only leaving a golden streak of light behind him. He was simply too fast! With the treasure supporting him, he was able to move even faster than the Radiant King.

The short spear still arrived in front of Ning; it had actually been able to change direction mid-flight. Clang! Ning didn’t dare to take it lightly. He used all six Northbow swords to block simultaneously, only to sense a powerful surge of might transmit to him from the strike. Ning couldn’t help but stumble a few steps backwards as he hurriedly retreated, transforming into a streak of golden lightning that fled.

As for the short spear, the collision knocked it to one side. It went flying straight towards the Fumo clan leader, forcing the muscular silver man to hurriedly dodge to one side.

“Don’t let him escape!”

“Slow him down.”

“How can he be this fast?” Although the three clan leaders were extremely anxious, they could do nothing but watch as Ning transformed into an incomprehensibly fast speed of golden light that seemed to be even faster than the four figures chasing behind it.

Swoosh! Ning pulled farther and farther away as he flew off into the distance.

“He actually escaped.” The three clan leaders exchanged glances, feeling anxious, angry, and helpless. They knew that given their own speed, they stood no chance of catching Ning at all.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. The four figures flew towards them and came to a halt, watching with ugly looks on their faces as Ning fled off into the distance.

“You three useless pieces of trash.” One of the figures glanced disdainfully at the three clan leaders. “You couldn’t even handle such a simple task. If you were able to slow him down for just a few seconds, we would’ve been able to surround and kill him for sure! Hmph. Any of the Silver Daolords of the old, true Sithe were far more powerful than you. You are the weakest Silver Daolords we brothers have ever encountered.

Not just every Sithe was permitted to become a Silver Daolord. One had to first reach the supreme Daolord level. Given Sithe training methods, they proportionally had far more supreme Daolords than the cultivators. The three clan leaders’ weakness was their low level of understanding of the Dao. If they were at the supreme Daolord level, Ning would’ve been finished long ago.

The three clan leaders smiled ingratiatingly and didn’t argue, but in their hearts they secretly grumbled. These four were nothing more than golems. By what right did they act so arrogantly?

Indeed. These four figures were all Emperor-class golems, but they were noticeably much more powerful than the others. Every single one of them was on par with a lord of the Sacred Cities! Although Ning had just barely reached that level as well, he was still lacking in many respects; if he was

to actually fight against a real lord of a Sacred City, he would be completely dominated. These four golems, however, were each capable of fighting a Sacred City lord to a standstill.

“Four seniors, Daolord Darknorth has barged into our forbidden grounds and should be killed,” the silver-haired man said. “We should hunt him down and kill him.”

“Our responsibility is to watch over and guard this forbidden region. Since he has already escaped and left this region, we naturally will not pursue him any further. If you wish to do so, that is your business.” The four figures glanced coldly at the three clan leaders, then turned and flew away. They truly did look down upon these three clan leaders. Although they were members of the Sithe thanks to having undergone the Ritual Sacrificium, they were really far too weak when compared to true Sithe experts!

“Those four idiots.” The three clan leaders ground their teeth in rage.

“They are nothing more than golems. They shall forever do nothing more than obey the orders of the Sithe race. This area has clearly been completely destroyed, but they continue to guard it and regard it as a restricted area. Why bother getting angry with golems?” The three clan leaders turned and left.

The Emperor-class golems they had caught in recent years were all fairly weak ones that were comparable to supreme Daolords. They wouldn’t dare to even fight against the four strongest golems, much less capture them and bind them by force.

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Thanks to the speed boost provided by the treasure, Ning quickly outstripped his pursuers.

“Oh, they actually didn’t chase?” After fleeing quite a distance, Ning turned to see the four figures chatting with the three clan leaders, followed by the four figures returning to the core areas.

“Judging from what I saw, those four figures should’ve been golems.”

Ning nodded. "Golems actually managed to become this powerful... the Sithe's mastery over golems far surpassed ours." Based on the golems the six powers in the Endless Territories had acquired, it seemed as though there were different levels of power amongst Emperor-class golems. The ones he had fought had all been weak, while this time he had finally stumbled across strong ones.

"I've already found four of those onyx humanoid corpses here. These things held an advantage over Hegemons in single combat!" Ning sighed with amazement. "Even Crimsonwave Temple merely had two of these Hegemon overseers protecting it, but I count four dead ones here already!"

"That means this place is probably even more important than Crimsonwave Temple!" Ning was intrigued. Given how much combat power had been focused on this place by the Sithe, it probably held treasures which were far more valuable than the treasures inside Crimsonwave Temple!

"However... this place seems to have been wrecked by that claw-attacker. He butchered countless Sithe and probably took away the most valuable treasures," Ning mused privately. "I hope he left a few things behind." He didn't even consider the possibility that the claw-attacker had died, as anyone capable of easily ripping those onyx humanoids in half had reached a level of power that was far beyond his imagination.

Hegemons definitely weren't capable of thus. Then... Otherverse Lords, perhaps? Or even... the legendary Autarchs?

Whoooosh. The three clan leaders flew towards Ning from afar. "Those three fellows have come to cause trouble again." Ning frowned, then began to dart forwards while maintaining as much distance from the three clan leaders as he could.

While flying, Ning continuously scanned through the towering palace ruins around him. He didn't dare to fly about randomly, for fear of accidentally activating some traps or mechanisms the Sithe had left behind. Thus, the three clan leaders were able to quickly catch up to him.

Ning gave them a sidelong glance.

“Count yourself lucky for having escaped that,” the muscular silver man said with a cold laugh.

“You survived once, but you won’t survive every time. I urge you to leave our ancestral grounds immediately. Otherwise, you’ll probably die here. The Sithe left behind many terrifying barriers and guardians. Although the vast majority were ruined and only a few survived, any of them would be enough to claim your puny life. Leave the ancestral grounds and live for a bit longer,” the skinny silver man said.

Ning completely ignored them. He might not be able to beat them, but they weren’t able to do anything to him either. “I just need to stay careful at all times. Can’t give them any opportunities.” Ning carefully scrutinized his surroundings, visualizing how the palace ruins must’ve looked in the past and thus predicting where certain treasures might lay.

“Judging from the layout, there should’ve been a secondary nexus over there.” Ning continued his search, quickly discovering a bestial stone statue within a pile of rubble. This stone statue looked rather similar to a three-headed lion!

“Eh? The style of this statue seems rather different from that of the Sithe buildings.” Ning was puzzled. He stared carefully and cautiously at the stone statue as he slowly moved towards it.

Whoosh. The central head of the three-headed lion statue suddenly opened its mouth. Its mouth seemed to be filled with an infinite universe in it, and an awe-inspiring amount of power suddenly swept out from the lion’s mouth.

Boom! A terrifying sucking power was applied to Ning, who was shocked to find that he couldn’t resist it at all. He felt like an ordinary mortal who had been trapped in an ocean whirlpool as he was drawn inexorably into the lion’s mouth. Ning shrank in size as he was drawn in closer and closer before finally becoming ant-sized as he entered the lion’s mouth.

“He went inside.” The three clan leaders who had been following Ning were shocked, and they hurriedly went over to inspect the lion.

“Such incredible power. There has to be a major treasure inside.”

“The Sithe left many hidden rooms with countless treasures. This place has to be one of them.”

“Daolord Darknorth didn’t seem to be attacked; it looks as though he’s just flying deeper inside.” They could clearly see from outside the lion’s mouth how Ning was continuously flying deeper and deeper.

“We can’t let Daolord Darknorth acquire those treasures. He’s already incredibly powerful; if he acquires even better treasures, we’re going to be doomed.”

“We’re the Sithe! Sithe treasures belong to us.”

“Come, let us go inside.” The three hesitated for a while outside before transforming into streaks of light that flew towards the lion. They did this partially because they naturally felt the need to prevent Ning from acquiring any more treasures, and partially because they didn’t really worry about danger. They were Sithe! Even if they entered some incredibly important restricted areas, they would at most be unceremoniously kicked out. Over the course of all these years, not a single clan leader had perished within the ancestral grounds.

“Where am I?” Ning stared at the rainbow region around him. The aura emanating from this region was incredibly exalted, and the power flowed everywhere. Clearly, this truly was an exceptional place.

“Eh?” Ning’s face suddenly tightened as he glanced backwards. “They came inside as well.”

The three silver men flew over, excited looks on their faces. As soon as they sensed the aura and power held within this region, they understood that this was an extraordinary place.

“Daolord Darknorth, all thanks to you!”

“If it wasn’t for you, we never would’ve discovered this place.” The three clan leaders were quite smug.

Right at this moment, a humanoid figure suddenly coalesced in the center of this bright rainbow region. This figure was dressed in long black robes, was pale-faced, had blood-red eyes, and looked both handsome and

evil. He stared at the three clan leaders, an icy look on his face as his voice boomed out, shaking the entire world: "I invited this cultivator to come in, but how dare you three Sithe barge in as well! Do you think you are worthy of entering an Autarch's territory? Die."

Boom! Suddenly, a ripple of spatial power swept across the three silver men. They instantly turned pale, but before they could so much as say a word their bodies were split in half at the waist. A heartbeat later, their eyes turned dull as they perished.

The six parts of the three silver men's corpses just hung there in midair.

Chapter 25: Autarch Bolin

Ji Ning was rather stunned when he saw this. Those three silver men had been incredibly strong... how had they been so easily slain?

Still, when he thought of the three words 'an Autarch's territory' he began to understand. Anything that had even the most tenuous of connections to an Autarch was guaranteed to be extraordinary. Autarchs were the most supreme leaders of the entire cultivator civilization! They were even able to create those alternate universes which Eternal Emperors fought over like rabid dogs, seeking to take control over them and become Otherverse Lords!

Those otherverses were nothing more than constructs devised by the Autarchs. This was a testament to how mighty the Autarchs were.

"Senior." Ning stared at the wicked black-robed figure. He couldn't help but ask, "This place is an Autarch's territory? Are you saying that one of the legendary Autarchs set this place up?"

"Correct." The black-robed man revealed a hint of a smile as a flicker of pride appeared in his eyes. "My master was named Bolin. The countless cultivators of the Chaosverse reverentially refer to him as Autarch Bolin. Aside from the few other Autarchs who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him, there is no one in all the Chaosverse who is his equal. Young fellow, you are currently just a Daolord; you can't even imagine just how powerful an Autarch is."

Ning could sense the benevolent intentions radiating from this man. In truth, when he heard the words 'I invited this cultivator to come in' Ning immediately realized that this person was a friend, not a foe. Given how he was able to annihilate the three clan leaders with ease, there was no need for him to deceive Ning.

Ning couldn't help but ask, "Senior, are Autarchs capable of reversing the flows of spacetime within a chaosworld to revive a Celestial Immortal whose truesoul was destroyed?"

"Of course! Forget about Celestial Immortals, even World-level

cultivators can be rescued if the Autarch was willing.” The black-robed man shook his head. “However, being ‘able’ to do so is one thing; being ‘willing’ to do so is another. Reversing spacetime to revive someone will cause the Autarch to endure a backlash from the prime essences of the entire Chaosverse. Not even an Autarch would suffer something like this lightly. You would have to pay a high price, a price which would sway even an Autarch.”

Ning nodded slowly.

“Come with me,” the black-robed man instructed. He glanced sideways at the corpses of the three silver men. “Right, go ahead and collect those corpses. They probably have a few treasures on them.”

“Alright.” Ning waved his hand, collecting all three corpses.

“Instead of being actual cultivators, they chose to undergo the Ritual Sacrificium and serve as the pawns of the Sithe.” The black-robed man shook his head. “And the most unsightly Sithe pawns I’ve ever seen.”

“The most unsightly?” Ning was surprised.

The black-robed man nodded. “True Sithe are extremely powerful! Generally speaking, the stronger a Sithe is, the more unwilling he is to undergo the Ritual Sacrificium. Although the ritual will allow them to rapidly increase in strength within a short period of time, they lose all hope of making any further breakthroughs. This is why strong Sithe disdain such an act.”

“As for these three fools? They can’t even compare to real Silver Daolords in power, while Silver Daolords represented the most common footsoldiers in the Sithe army. During that great war, Hegemons served as the mainstays in each army! Long ago, our five Autarchs united the forces of all cultivators in the entire Chaosverse to fight that great war. The Autarchs served as the vanguard, the edge of the blade that tore through all of the important Sithe locations,” the black-robed man said. “For example, this entire thing was once a Sithe warship.”

“Warship?” Ning had never imagined that the ‘Stone Hellephant Wall’ was actually a warship!

“Well, I suppose it would be more appropriate to describe it as a terrifying war-fortress! It was capable of easily tearing through spacetime and going from realmverse to realmverse. This warship was so powerful that it was able to slay Hegemons in the blink of an eye,” the black-robed man said.

“Not even a squad of ten Hegemons working together were able to fight this thing to a standstill. Thus, when my master discovered this thing he continued to pursue it without pause. It fled at high speed, tearing through spacetime repeatedly as it tried to escape, but my master was able to enter it and then slaughter a path through it. He ruined this entire warship, slaying more than thirty thousand Sithe and destroying all of the golems. He destroyed everything, leaving nothing behind!”

Ning was breathless upon hearing this. So this was how powerful an Autarch was?! “All the golems were destroyed?” Ning was puzzled. “But I still saw plenty of Emperor-class golems outside.”

“To my master, those golems posed no conceivable threat at all. He let out a casual strike, destroying all the golems and then immediately departing this place. He had to hurry off to a different battlefield and continue the war against the Sithe,” the black-robed man said. “In truth, however, these Sithe golems all possessed self-repair mechanisms.”

“They looked like they had been destroyed, but some were able to regenerate. As more time passed, some were able to slowly rebuild themselves. Some actually scavenged for parts from other golems that had been destroyed. Thus, a fraction of the golems are still alive, but they pose no real danger at all.”

Ning was speechless. ‘No real danger at all’? He had been forced to flee in pathetic fashion by those four Emperor-class golems which were comparable to the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. Still, it made sense; to Autarch Bolin, those creatures were nothing more than ants. Any Hegemon would’ve been able to destroy them with ease. They really didn’t pose any danger to the cultivator civilization in general.

“Follow me,” the black-robed man instructed as he flew forwards.

“Yes.” Ning followed from behind.

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By now, the three great clans were in a state of utter panic. Although they had been extremely stunned by the deaths of so many Daolords, they still felt fairly calm because they knew that the Silver Daolords were the true foundation of power for them! Every single clan leader was able to inherit the legacy of a Silver Daolord.

But now...

“How is this possible?”

“The clan leaders died?”

“How could they have died? How could the clan leaders have died?”

“Impossible. No clan leader has ever been killed since the establishment of the three great clans.”

They were all completely dumbfounded. The three great clans didn't even know what they should do next, because they had never encountered a situation like this since they had been created. Clan leaders always died when their lifespans came to an end! None had ever been killed. Now that they had been killed, the 'Silver Daolord' legacy had clearly been lost as well. How would they be able to protect themselves without any Silver Daolords?

“What should we do? The entire Fumo clan only has a single Daolord left!” They were all utterly terrified.

“Go to the ancestral grounds! Go now and seize back the Silver Daolord legacy!”

“You idiot! Seize it? Seize it how?! All three clan leaders were slain; if I went, I would be instantly annihilated by Daolord Darknorth!”

“We can't afford any further losses at all.”

“Everyone... the three great clans have been defeated. Defeated! The only thing we can do is protect our clan as best we can, using the Sithe disks and the many barriers left behind by our ancestors! So long as Daolord

Darknorth can't breach our barriers, he won't be able to enter. All we can do is delay as long as we can. Once Daolord Darknorth's lifespan comes to an end and he dies, we'll use our Emperor-class golems to rise to power once more."

"Yes, delaying is all we can do."

The three great clans simultaneously came to this same decision. Right now, they each only had one or two Daolords left. It must be remembered that only Daolords were capable of syncing with the Sithe disks that maintained the clan barriers. Once the clans lost their Daolords, they would be completely doomed!

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The black-robed man flew into the sky, leading Ning behind him.

"During that great war, the Autarchs made contingency plans in the event of defeat," the black-robed man said. "If they were defeated, we would need to be able to raise a new 'crop' of experts who would continue the struggle against the Sithe. Thus, my master Autarch Bolin set up many beastworlds. He put estate-worlds in every single beast statue, and the Daos he put into them were Daos which could lead to Autarchy!"

"Lead towards Autarchy?" Ning's heart trembled.

"Don't get too excited. It only 'leads' towards Autarchy, but actually reaching the Autarch level is far too difficult." The black-robed man laughed. "Although the Sithe were extremely powerful as a group, they didn't have any individuals who could match our Autarchs in power, which was why they were defeated in the end. Autarchs are just too powerful. Just look at this warship! It was incredibly powerful, but it was viewed as nothing more but a plaything by the Autarchs."

"Generally speaking, only Eternal Emperors are qualified to enter these beastworlds. I generally have no interest in Daolords at all, and they aren't qualified to enter." The black-robed man smiled. "But just now, I noticed that you were actually able to battle those three pathetic Silver Daolords to a standstill. I was quite surprised by this. You were just a Daolord, after all, and I can tell that you aren't wielding a Universe treasure. For you to be

able to unleash such might is quite rare indeed, which was why I permitted you to enter. I hope you will not disappoint me.”

Chapter 26: Daobirth

“Here we are.” The black-robed man pointed off into the distance. Ji Ning followed his gaze, only to see a Daoist altar hanging in the air with nine pillars above it.

“How odd. This region is enormous, but it is completely empty. This Daoist altar is the only thing here.” Ning was rather puzzled, but he still followed the black-robed man as they flew towards the altar.

Whoosh. As soon as they landed atop the altar, Ning immediately smelled a certain fragrance pervade his nostrils. His mind grew sharper, and even his thinking speed began to quickly skyrocket. This was a marvelous effect that seemed quite similar to the Stone Censer of Reunion.

“This altar has the effect of helping you focus your mind and meditate on the Dao,” the black-robed man said. “An Autarch’s Dao is unfathomably profound and mysterious, after all. It would be extremely difficult for Eternal Emperors to even memorize it without help.”

“Sit here in the lotus position within the center of that circle.” The black-robed man pointed towards a circle that was roughly nine meters in diameter. “Sit in the lotus position there and view the surrounding area. There you shall find the Autarch’s Dao.”

“Yes, senior.” Ning felt his heartrate speed up. There were very, very few things which could make him feel so nervous and so eager. He walked into the circle, sat down in the lotus position, then stared at his surroundings.

“Eh?” Ning turned pale. The vast region around him, which had formerly been empty and devoid of all things, suddenly began to manifest traces and vestiges of a Dao.

Boom! A fiery red bird suddenly appeared in the empty void in front of him, spreading its wings and soaring towards the skies. Its Dao was vast and awe-inspiring, burning through all things and reducing them to ash. Nothing could withstand such a thing! This was a physical manifestation of a Dao.

In the past, Ning had once seen something similar when he had seen Daolord Windsourc's 'Hundred Streams of the Windsourc'. Compared to this firebird manifestation of the Dao, however, it was unfathomably punier. If the visualization of the 'Hundred Streams of the Windsourc' was like a stream, then the fiery bird was like an endlessly vast sea!

"What's that?" Ning turned his head slightly to glance towards a different direction. There he saw a pitch-black long saber that was extremely thin and sharp. The blade was aimed towards the heavens, and the saber was so vast that it was on par with that giant fiery bird. Its power was stately and reserved, but the edge of the blade seemed to be brimming with explosive power. This was a Saber Dao which inspired utter terror in Ning, a Dao that was just as capable of annihilating all in its path.

"The Sword Dao?" Next to the 'Saber Dao' hanging in the air, Ning also saw a similarly massive sword. This was a strange rapier-like sword that had had no blade at all, just an incredibly sharp tip. This rapier was massive and also pointed straight towards the heavens. This was a Sword Dao that focused on one aspect of the sword to the extreme. Given Ning's mastery of the Dao of the Sword, he was immediately able to recognize that this 'Rapier Dao' was a path that represented the fusion of his Blood Drop stance and his Soleheart stance, and in both the wielder had completely eclipsed Ning's current level of mastery. It represented an absolutely incomparable level of might.

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A giant flaming bird, a long black saber, a rapier, a black mist, a feather, a blood-colored stream, a golden sun, a vast gray sky, a dazzling rainbow... these were the nine manifestations of the Daos that appeared in the vast void. All of these Daos were on par with each other.

"This is..." Ning raised his head to stare towards the skies above him.

In the heavens above him, he saw an incomparably massive hand. The fingers on this hand were extremely slender, while the fingernails were extremely sharp. The hand was formed into a claw-stance! This great claw was filled with an incomparably exalted and absolutely tyrannical aura

that filled the heavens themselves. Ning could feel his very true soul shuddering when he simply looked at the thing. Compared to that single massive hand, the other nine Daos were unfathomably weaker.

If those nine great Daos were like vast oceans, then that great hand was like the countless stars of the cosmos themselves. It truly was incomprehensibly more powerful.

“Do you understand now?” The black-robed man spoke out when he saw Ning raise his head upwards.

“I do not.” Ning suppressed the excitement he felt and halted his viewings. These Dao manifestations were of tremendous benefit to him. “However, this junior can tell that Autarch Bolin’s claw-arts were so powerful as to be completely unfathomable.”

“Ehehe.” The black-robed man laughed, “Long ago, my master Autarch Bolin relied on his claw-arts to become a Hegemon! However, he remained trapped at the Hegemon level for many years, unable to make a breakthrough, and so he began to meditate on other Daos as well. The Dao of Space, the Dao of Time, the Dao of the Sword, the Dao of the Saber, the Dao of Darkness... he mastered nine Daos in total on his own, reaching the Hegemon level in all of them.”

Ning was awestruck upon hearing this. To be able to reach the Hegemon level in a single Dao was already terrifyingly impressive. Autarch Bolin had done that for nine other Daos as well?!

“All Daos are linked; the more Daos he mastered, the deeper Master’s insights into the Dao of the Claw grew. Finally, all of those insights burst forth like water crashing through a shattered dam, and my master reached the Daobirth level, the level where ‘one Dao births many Daos’. He became an Autarch,” the black-robed man explained.

“One Dao births many Daos?” Ning was puzzled.

“Eternal Emperors must gain eternal Daos for themselves. As for Autarchs, they must reach the level where ‘one Dao births many Daos’, what we call the ‘Daobirth’ level,” the black-robed man explained. “At the apex, all Daos are linked together, which is why once you reach the

Autarch level you will naturally gain insight into many Daos you had never even trained in before.”

“My master, for example, managed to reach the ‘Daobirth’ level through his Dao of the Claw. He established an alternate universe with the Dao of the Claw as its original prime essence, which then unfolded through the form of countless other Daos,” the black-robed man explained.

Ning now understood. How incredible. Did this mean that once he reached the apex of his Omega Sword Dao, it would be able to give birth to many other Daos, such as the Daos of metal, wood, water, fire, earth, spacetime, darkness, and light? The mere thought of it stunned him. How strong would his Omega Sword Dao have to become, for it to naturally give birth to countless other Daos?

“To go from the Hegemon level to the Autarch level is far, far too difficult,” the black-robed figure said. “Enough. I’ve already told you everything you need to know. Calm your mind and go back to your viewings. Memorize all of this as quickly as you can. That way, even after you leave this place you can still meditate on what you have seen.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded. He did indeed have to memorize all of this, but doing so would be extremely difficult. The Dao of an Autarch was truly inconceivable; just memorizing its appearance was as difficult as asking an ordinary mortal to memorize a language with hundreds of millions of characters. Still, Ning understood that he had to memorize it despite its difficulty, because he couldn’t stay here for the rest of his life. Only by memorizing it would he be able to train in it whenever he wished.

“Senior,” Ning couldn’t help but add, “This junior does have a request.”

“A request?” The black-robed man was puzzled. “Go ahead.”

“This junior has an extremely good friend who is also a supreme Daolord. Can he come out and view this Dao and be guided by it as well?” Ning asked.

This Dao might not be of tremendous use to him in meditating on the Dao, but there was another aspect to it. The path of a cultivation was an extremely long one, and there were many hidden pitfalls and problems

which cultivators could fall into. This Dao would serve as a lamp post which would illuminate the path to Autarchy, resolving the questions cultivators would have. Ning and Ninedust were lifelong friends; he naturally wanted to help Ninedust out.

“A supreme Daolord?” The black-robed man chuckled. “Listen, kid... I already told you that I really don’t have any interest in Daolords at all. I’m generally only interested in particularly powerful Eternal Emperors! You, however, are far stronger than other supreme Daolords despite not even having a Universe treasure. This is why I’ve given you a special chance. As for ‘ordinary’ supreme Daolords, they can forget about it.”

“Forget about it?” Ning was rather anxious but he didn’t know what to say to persuade the man.

“It’s not that I’m stingy.” The black-robed man shook his head. “The greatest barrier any and all cultivators shall face is the Daomerge!”

“To advance from Hegemony to Autarchy is perhaps just as difficult as the Daomerge, but at least there isn’t a danger of dying,” the black-robed man said. “But the Daomerge is not only difficult, it is also fatal when failed. If you fail, you are destined to die and your Dao shall vanish.”

“Thus... the cultivator civilization as a whole doesn’t care that much about Daolords. New crops of Daolords arise in every generation, with the previous crop of Daolords having perished. Far, far too few supreme Daolords are able to skyrocket to the Hegemon level of power,” the black-robed man said. “Thus, it really isn’t worth us wasting too much time or energy on supreme Daolords.”

Ning was speechless. He had to admit that the man made sense. To this very day, the Endless Territories only had three Hegemons! One could already imagine how this current crop of supreme Daolords, including Winesage, Dawnstar, the Radiant King, and even Ning himself would eventually perish. For even one Hegemon to emerge from their ranks would be a stroke of incredible luck. The most likely outcome was that all of them would fail and all of them would die.”

“You, however, are a bit special. If you really do succeed in the

Daomerge, you will definitely be more powerful than most Hegemons,” the black-robed man said. “That’s the only reason why I’m giving you a chance. There’s no need for me to waste my time on other ‘supreme’ Daolords.”

Chapter 27: 120 Million Years

“All things and all beings are given a chance,” Ji Ning couldn’t help but rebut.

The black-robed man paused slightly. These words had indeed moved him, as they were a bedrock of faith which all cultivators believed in. There were no absolutes in the world; there was always a chance, no matter how slim.

“Hah! What you say makes sense.” Intrigued, the black-robed man turned to grin at Ning. “Then I’ll give that friend of yours a chance.”

“Truly?” Ning was delighted.

“All he has to do is capture an Emperor-class golem without relying on any outside sources of help or a Universe treasure. If he can do that, I’ll let him meditate here,” the black-robed man said.

Ning was stunned upon hearing this. Capture an Emperor-class golem? All of the golems within these Si the ruins were at least at the supreme Daolord level. It would be incredibly hard for the Ninedust Sectlord to capture one of them.

“There lies his chance and his opportunity,” the black-robed man said. “I’ve given him the chance. If he can seize it, I’ll give him the opportunity to train here. If he cannot... then there’s nothing for it. I really have no interest in ordinary, unremarkable Daolords at all.”

“Understood. Thank you, senior.” Ning didn’t dare to press his luck. He immediately said, “My friend is within my personal estate-treasure. Should I...?”

“I’ll send you out. Make some arrangements for your friend, then re-enter,” the black-robed man said.

“Acknowledged,” Ning assented.

The black-robed man waved his sleeves. Whoosh. Ning was immediately sent flying backwards as space twisted around him.

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The ant-sized Ning came flying out from the mouth of that stone lion statue, regaining his normal size once he exited. The lion's mouth, however, remained open. He would be able to re-enter whenever he chose to.

Whoosh. Ning waved his hand, allowing Ninedust to come out.

"How did it go, Darknorth?" Ninedust immediately queried Ning upon exiting, scanning the surrounding area as he did so. He was instantly stunned by what he saw. "What is this place? What's with the rubble? Wait, I see a few statues over there; they seem absolutely incredible! Is this the secret place you were talking about? Why isn't there anyone around here? Where are the three clan leaders?"

"Calm down and relax," Ning said. "One question at a time. Listen to me explain." Ning started to narrate the situation from the beginning, even telling Ninedust everything about the Autarch's territory.

"The senior has said that if you can capture an Emperor-class golem by yourself without needing to resort to a Universe treasure or outside sources of power, he'll let you train as well." Ning said helplessly, "That's the only way he'll let you in."

"Autarch? One Dao births many Daos? Just thinking about it is inconceivable." Ninedust said excitedly, "Haha, I was wondering who would be incredible enough to cause this sort of damage. So it was an Autarch who ruined this place! Thank you so much, Darknorth; helping me get this slim chance was already a blessing. I'll do my absolute best. Given my current level of power, I should still have a chance to capture one of those Emperor-class golems."

"Right." Ning nodded. Still, he knew that Ninedust was significantly weaker than any of the three clan leaders had been! The three clan leaders were generally able to capture Emperor-class golems in solo fights. Still, Ninedust did have advantages of his own. His Dao was far more profound than theirs had been; their attacks were extremely clumsy and straightforward. Ning was merely on par with the three clan leaders, but

he had been able to easily capture three Emperor-class golems when surrounded by six. This was precisely because Ning vastly outstripped those golems in both power and insight into the Dao.

“Go ahead. Don’t worry about me. Haha, now that the three clan leaders have died, there’s no one capable of threatening me,” Ninedust said.

“Remember, don’t get too close to the core regions,” Ning said.

“Don’t worry. You have escape-type treasures, so do I.” Ninedust smirked. “And I won’t go too far; I only need to find one of the ordinary Emperor-class golems, after all.”

“Alright. You have to be careful.” After speaking, Ning walked towards the mouth of that stone lion. As he did, his body shrank in size before being drawn into the lion’s mouth.

“Alright, kid. Your friend won you a chance to earn yourself a shot at entering this place. The rest is up to you. Let’s see if you are able to capture an Emperor-class golem. The most talented of supreme Daolords are generally capable of this.” A rumbling voice rang out from the lion’s mouth. Moments later, the lion’s mouth shut.

Ninedust immediately said respectfully, “Yes, senior.” His eyes gleamed with light. He knew that this person’s words were correct; extremely talented first-tier Daolords were all capable of succeeding in this task.

The Radiant King, for example, would be able to rely on his overwhelming superiority in speed to capture an Emperor-class golem, while Palace Lord Dawnstar would be able to use his raw power. “I’ll be able to do it as well.” Ninedust immediately began to search for those Emperor-class golems who were in hiding.

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Ninedust remained outside, beginning his hunt for an Emperor-class golem. As for Ning, after entering the beastworld he began to once more view the Autarch’s Daos. Ning only had a shot at memorizing these Daos because of the incredible effects of the altar, and so he had to remain inside of it. If he was anywhere else, these Daos would completely eclipse

the bounds of Ning's memorization abilities. Thus, Ning didn't use any temporal acceleration treasure; if he entered his cottage, he would be unable to make full use of the effects of the altar.

"How absolutely incredible. Nine incredible Daos and that awesome Dao of the Claw. As a Hegemon, Autarch Bolin was able to master a total of ten Daos to the Hegemon level. No wonder he was able to become an Autarch in the end." The more Ning learned and memorized, the more awe he felt.

The 'impressions' of the ten Daos began to grow clearer and clearer within his memories. What he needed to do was to perfectly engrave all of them into his mind.

Time flowed on. During the very first year, Ning was able to fully memorize the Dao of the Sword. In fact, because the Sword Dao which Autarch Bolin had devised felt similar to a fusion of the Blood Drop stance and the Soleheart stance, the memorization process caused Ning to accidentally break through to the fourth stage with his Blood Drop stance!

This was primarily because his Blood Drop stance had already made incredible gains in Crimsonwave Temple, more gains than any of the rest of the five stances of his Omega Sword Dao. In this place, the influence of the Autarch's Daos and Sword Dao resulted in Ning shooting to the fourth stage almost immediately.

After another thirty years, Ning finished memorizing the other eight Daos as well. With that, all nine of the Hegemon-level Daos had been memorized.

Ning raised his head to look upwards, finally beginning to stare at the vast claw-stanced hand which hung in the heavens above him. This hand seemed to blot out the skies themselves and was as vast and endless as the cosmos. It was supremely exalted, a Dao which birthed many other Daos. Just staring at the palm and the Dao of the Claw, Ning was able to vaguely make out a quietly gurgling stream of water, a roaring blaze of fire, saber-light and sword-shadows, as well as the threads of karma...

Daobirth.

The core of it remained the Dao of the Claw... but actually memorizing it was incredibly difficult for Ning.

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When meditating on the Dao, one would not notice the passage of time. Ning was completely absorbed in silently meditating on the enormous claw-hand which hung in the skies above him. He continuously memorized everything he saw, not stopping for a single instant as he borrowed from the power of the altar. Not just him; even his Primaltwin and his avatar were completely focused on the memorization process. The Primaltwin used the Stone Censer of Reunion and thus was able to memorize at 30% the speed of his true body.

Clearly, this altar was purpose-designed and thus was incredibly effective in helping one memorize things.

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The white-robed youth sat there within the levitating altar, those nine stone pillars slowly revolving around him. The years that passed hadn't left behind the slightest of marks on him.

"I've finished memorizing it." Ning opened his eyes. Within his mind appeared perfectly clear images of the nine Hegemon-level Daos and the awesome Autarch-level Dao of the Claw. Their forms had been fully engraved into his mind... but of course, this was just their form alone. Thus, they could only serve as guideposts!

In truth, this was already enough. Ning knew that every cultivator had a different path to follow; to have guideposts was sufficient. If he tried to force himself to master the Autarch's Dao, it would probably actually hinder his own path.

Ning rose to his feet.

"Hahaha... just 120 million years. Your comprehension abilities aren't bad. You managed to memorize it quite quickly." The black-robed man suddenly appeared next to Ning.

"Ninedust...?" Ning glanced around, only to find that he was still alone.

“Your friend? He’s still outside battling against those Emperor-class golems. He looks as though he’s improved quite a bit; a few more breakthroughs and he might actually be able to capture one of them.” The black-robed man smiled. “Darknorth, per my master’s instructions, every single person who came in here to meditate will be given a treasure based on how well they performed.”

“Bestowed a treasure?” Ning’s eyes lit up.

“My master, Autarch Bolin, did this because he was worried about being defeated. As a result, he spared no expense in arranging for later generations of cultivators to rise to power,” the black-robed man said. “Go ahead into the outside world and battle against those golems the Sithe left behind. Let me see how strong you have grown. The better your performance is, the better a treasure I will give you.”

Ning began to feel rather excited.

“Go. Show me just how powerful a ‘mere’ Daolord can become,” the black-robed man said quite eagerly. After a person forcibly memorized the physical manifestation of an Autarch’s Dao, he would be able to rapidly make actual use of those insights in combat. After 120 million years of memorization, it was time for an explosive period of growth in power.

Still... as the black-robed man saw it, given how strong Daolord Darknorth was, the man was most likely extremely close to his lifespan limit. He probably wouldn’t have grown all that much.

“I’ll definitely do my absolute best,” Ning said.

Whoosh. The black-robed man waved his arm, causing a spatial ripple to surround Ning and deliver him out of this beastworld and into the Sithe ruins outside.

Chapter 28: The Emperor Golems

The palace ruins stretched far off into the horizon. There seemed to be no end to them.

“More than thirty thousand true Sithe once lived here.” Ji Ning stared at the ruins, rather moved. “I really wonder how different the Sithe civilization was from our cultivator civilization.”

“Darknorth.” A delight cry rang out from far away as a streak of light quickly shot towards Ning and descended. It was Ninedust.

“You finally came out. I’ve been fighting like an idiot for millions of years, all by myself,” Ninedust said with an overjoyed look on his face.

“You really disappoint me. All this time, and you haven’t caught a single Emperor-class golem?” Ning said.

“Hey, don’t blame me for that. I managed to make some improvements after inspecting those claw-marks left behind in the palace ruins, but...” Ninedust said anxiously, “But there are more than a hundred of those Emperor-class golems, and they all hide behind the remaining barriers set up by the Sithe. There’s no way for me to force them out at all. My only choice is to wait for a chance. One time, I damn near caught one of those things, but the other golems jumped into help the first one out.”

Ning now understood. The golems weren’t so foolish as to fight in solo combat! When the situation turned grim for one of them, the others would step in to help out! This was why the three great clans had labored for so long to capture Emperor-class golems, and yet only had a few in each clan.

“I have an idea.” Ning mentally transmitted his suggestion to Ninedust.

Ninedust’s eyes lit up when he heard this. “Haha...”

“That’s the only real thing I can do. If you STILL cannot capture an Emperor-class golem, there’s nothing else I can do,” Ning sent mentally.

“Don’t worry.” Ninedust suddenly thought of something. He said hurriedly, “Oh, right. I almost forgot! I’ve been battling in these ruins for countless years and have discovered quite a few dangerous regions within

it. Fortunately, I have an invulnerable aquaform; otherwise, I would've died long ago. Here's a map of all the danger zones I've discovered thus far. I prepared it for you long ago; I was just waiting for you to come out." As Ninedust spoke, he tossed a rolled map to Ning.

Ning accepted it and gave it a glance. There was a detailed map of the palace ruins here, with markings for the various danger zones. Ning revealed a delighted smile. Without this map, he would have to carefully explore for a very long period of time if he wanted to get a sense of what dangers lay here.

"Come, let's go catch us some golems," Ning said.

"Let's go." Ninedust was filled with eagerness as well.

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After a full month, Ninedust found another chance to engage an Emperor-class golem in a battle.

Whoosh. A vast wave swept out to encompass an area of over a million kilometers. The Ninedust Sectlord's upper body was visible and utterly massive. He wielded that longstaff in his hands, smashing it outwards like a stream of water that completely embodied the essence of the word 'entangle'.

No matter how the golem struggled, Ninedust's longstaff continued to circle around it, preventing it from fleeing no matter how it tried.

"In the past, Ninestaff's staff-arts were more explosive and dominating; now, they are much softer." Ning was hiding off in the distance using his Shadowless evasion-art, and he nodded at what he saw. If one was capable of both hard and soft techniques, one would be able to unleash still-greater power in combat.

"Although he's not able to completely defeat that golem, he can at least ensure the golem won't be able to flee. After enough time passes, the golem's energy reserves will run low. That's when it will be defeated." Ning could already guess what was about to happen.

A short while later... "Help!" The Emperor-class golem finally let out a

furious call for aid.

Swoosh. Swoosh. The battle had long ago attracted the attention of quite a few golems. Upon hearing their comrade plea for aid, two Emperor-class golems immediately charged over towards Ninedust.

Ning cracked a smile. “Here they come.” Ning transformed into a streak of light, clearly moving faster than a hundred times the speed of light as he flew towards the two golems. Prior to receiving the guidance of the Autarch’s Dao, Ning had already been at the limit of a hundred times of speed of light. Ever since his Blood Drop stance broke through to the fourth level, the power of his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop had doubled. This upgrading of his Dao resulted in Ning understanding many new things, and so his flying speed was also able to break past the bottleneck of a hundred times the speed of light.

“Who is that?”

“Where did he suddenly come from?” The two Emperor-class golem reinforcements were shocked. Ning had been maintaining the Shadowless evasion art the entire time and thus they hadn’t noticed him.

“Fight!” “Attack!”

“Friends, come and help out.” Although the two Emperor-class golems were shocked at first, they quickly calmed down. It was hard for even the three clan leaders to catch them when all three were working together; what did they have to fear? Instantly, all of the other watching golems charged towards them as well.

Whoosh. Ning had already reached the two Emperor-class golems, [Three Heads, Six Arms] active and six Northbow swords at the ready.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Streaks of mist-formed sword energy struck out with terrifying speed. Now that the Blood Drop stance’s power had doubled yet again, the attack was even faster than it had been before! The two Emperor-class golems frantically tried to defend, but they weren’t even able to touch Ning’s sword before it gently coiled around them and bound them in multiple

layers.

“In you go, and you too.” These two Emperor-class golems didn’t have invulnerable aquaforms, and so they were easily taken away forcibly by Ning.

“What?!” “How is this possible?!” The other five Emperor-class golems who had been charging over to reinforce their comrades were all terrified, as was the golem which was battling against Ninedust.

This newcomer had instantly captured two Emperor-class golems? How could he be so terrifyingly strong?

What they didn’t understand was that although the three clan leaders were extremely powerful, their attacks were clumsy and limited in speed to a hundred times the speed of light. Blocking their attacks was naturally quite easy! Ning, however, was different; his sword-arts were so incredibly fast that he far outstripped the Emperor-class golems in speed. Given how unpredictable his attacks were, he naturally was able to defeat and capture the golems in just a single clash.

Forget about two; even if five or six golems were attacking him, he would be able to easily defeat and capture at least half of them in a twinkling, then in the next twinkling catch the rest. This was what made Ning so dangerous!

Swoosh. After putting away the two golems, Ning turned to charge straight towards the reinforcement golems.

“Not good!”

“Hide.”

“Don’t fight him head-on!” The golems were all terrified. These golems were all roughly on the same level of power; if two of them had been captured in just a single clash, how could the others possibly dare to engage? They naturally were terrified into a hasty retreat.

“This Daolord is too powerful. He’s absolutely terrifying! Even worse than the three clan leaders.”

“What should we do?”

“Even if there were ten of us working together, we still wouldn’t be a match for him. He’d just capture us all, one after the other! I think we need at least thirty working together if we want to kill him.”

The golems quickly retreated behind some of the few remaining barriers. Neither Ning nor Ninedust dared to touch them, but since the golems belonged to the Sithe side they wouldn’t be attacked.

“Everyone, we have to hurry up and join forces against him,” the golems discussed internally.

The main problem was that the palace ruins were simply far, far too vast. The golems were all scattered across it by a distance of tens or even hundreds of millions of kilometers. To gather them all together would take time. If they tried to hastily gather together in smaller numbers, the end result would just be that Ning would defeat them one-by-one.

And so... the sixteen Emperor-class golems that were close to Ninedust’s battlefield were all so terrified that they didn’t dare to come and reinforce their ‘comrade’. After spending the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ninedust finally managed to deplete the Emperor-class golem’s energy reserves and caught it.

Actually, this was the exact same method the three great clans had used to capture those Emperor-class golems with invulnerable forms. This was why they had quite a few of them. All combat consumed energy, and golems didn’t have spirit-pills. Their regenerative speed was also far lower than that of cultivators! A short battle was fine, but a long battle they couldn’t escape from would result in capture once their energy stores were depleted.

“I finally caught one!” Ninedust was ecstatic.

“Congratulations.” Ning flew over.

“I only managed to catch one because you blocked the others. Does this even count?” Ninedust was still a bit worried.

Ning said with a laugh, “That senior only said that you aren’t allowed to

use Universe treasures or outside sources of help; you had to capture an Emperor-class golem on your own. And... that's exactly what you did! Me fighting a few others is a separate issue entirely. It should be fine. Let's go and ask."

"Alright." Ninedust rather nervously flew towards the lion statue. Thankfully, the treasure-spirit within that beastworld didn't stop him. Instead, it granted Ninedust entry.

"Haha..." Ning started to laugh. "With this bit of luck under his belt, brother Ninedust's chances at the Daomerge shall be a bit better now."

The Daomerge was far too difficult. If one wished to succeed in it, one needed to fight for every scrap of karmic fortune available. Ning wasn't confident in his own Daomerge chances, but he wished for his best friends to succeed in theirs.

"Emperor-class golems, eh? C'mere." Eager to do battle, Ning once more charged towards the golems. Wanting to capture them was part of his eagerness, but he also had the feeling that he was gaining new insights into the five stances of his Omega Sword Dao through combat. His Soleheart stance in particular felt as though it was just one step away from the fourth stage. Clearly, the 120 million years he had spent memorizing the Autarch's Dao had given Ning a wealth of experience to draw upon.

Chapter 29: The Plan

Within the beastworld. Ninedust was seated in the lotus position within the altar, staring at the giant claw-hand hanging in the heavens that surpassed and transcended everything else that was here.

“Whew.” Ninedust let out a long breath, then closed his eyes and revealed a smile. “Success. Finally, I see a glimmer of hope for myself regarding the Daomerge.”

When Ninedust had used up the Voidsea Jade seal, he had been able to simulate a Daomerge. Although the simulation was partial and incomplete, he had still benefited from it enormously... but alas, he still didn't feel good about his chances at the Daomerge. Now, however, he felt as though he had a shot.

“Autarchs... they truly are incredible.” Ninedust couldn't help but let out a sigh of praise as he rose to his feet.

“Eh? You've memorized everything already? It's only been five hundred million years. Not bad at all.” The black-robed figure materialized right next to him.

“Yes.” Ninedust smiled. “Not too shabby, but I wasn't as fast as Darknorth.” He was an Ancient cultivator; when he was a Daolord of the First Step, his divine body and soul were already comparable to those of most Daolords of the Third Step. Now that he had reached the fourth step, his body and soul were unimaginably powerful. This was why he had managed to memorize it all in just five hundred million years.

“Ah, right. Master once instructed that every single cultivator who was able to memorize these Daos would be given a treasure based on their performance; the better they perform, the better a treasure they receive. Darknorth, for example, has improved significantly! Once he comes back here, I'll definitely give him a superb treasure. Ninedust, go out and pick a few fights. Show me how much you've improved.”

“Treasure?” Ninedust grew excited.

“Yes, treasures the Autarch gave me to hand out.” The black-robed man had an enigmatic smile on his face. “An Autarch’s treasures are naturally extraordinary.”

“Alright, then let me leave right away.” Ninedust was eager to do battle. The black-robed man waved his hand, causing a spatial bubble to encompass Ninedust and teleport him outside the beastworld.

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As soon as Ninedust emerged, he saw the white-robed youth seated in the lotus position next to a shattered wall that was within the ruined palaces.

“Darknorth!” Ninedust called out.

The distant Ji Ning opened his eyes and smiled. “You finally came out. I’ve been waiting forever for you.”

“You call that ‘forever’? Verge-level Daolords have all spent tens of thousands of chaos cycles training before they go attempt their Daomerge. In comparison, the amount of time I just spent was absolutely nothing.” Ninedust transformed into a streak of light that flew over towards Ning, landing right before the shattered wall. He asked, “You must’ve improved quite a bit in recent years, eh?”

“Not bad.” Ning grinned. His improvements weren’t exactly minor, but neither were they extravagant. More than five hundred million years had just gone past! During this period of time, Ning had slowly absorbed the insights he had gained from memorizing the teachings of the Autarch. He had broken through to the fourth stage with the Blood Drop stance early on, but now he had done the same with the Soleheart, Yin-Yang, and Shadowless stances. However, the Heavenbreaker stance had yet to make the breakthrough.

Going from being a Daolord of the Third Step to being a Daolord of the Fourth Step was incredibly difficult to begin with. Ninedust and Badlands had both spent many chaos cycles doing just that, with Ninedust only succeeding thanks to the legacy he had gained from that ancestral Hegemon of the Ancient cultivators. As for Badlands, he still had yet to

reach the fourth step. As for Ning? His path was that of the Omega Sword Dao; it was far more difficult than Ninedust's.

To be able to make so many breakthroughs in just a few hundred million years was already terrifyingly fast, much faster than Ning had originally anticipated. It was all thanks to the Stone Censer of Reunion as well as the Autarch's guidance.

"Based on this level of speed... if I'm lucky, I might be able to become a Daolord of the Fourth Step after a chaos cycle." Ning felt quite eager. "If I'm not lucky, though, I could well be bottlenecked for ten or even a hundred chaos cycles."

Once he did take that final step and became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, the last great barrier awaiting Ning would be the Daomerge. That would be the true test, the deadly trial which he felt he had less than a 0.01% chance of passing.

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"Darknorth," Ninedust said excitedly, "That senior said that he would give each of us a treasure based on how well we perform. He also said that you've improved quite a bit. You'll definitely get one extraordinary treasure!"

"He praised my improvements as being significant?" Ning revealed an excited look.

"Yes, that's exactly what he said." Ninedust nodded.

Ning grew excited. He himself didn't know if his improvements counted as 'major' or 'minor' in the eyes of the treasure-spirit! Prior to memorizing the Autarch's guidance, he had yet to break through in any of the five stances of his Omega Sword Dao. Now, however, he had reached the fourth stage in four of those five stances. Was this 'major'? He wasn't sure, but upon hearing Ninedust's words Ning felt greatly relieved. He now eagerly awaited what would be coming next.

In truth, the spirit of the beastworld had believed that Ning had long ago reached the apex of power as a Daolord and that Ning thus had very little

room for improvement. Given how much stronger Ning had become, of course he viewed Ning's improvements as being incredible!

"Haha, good! Ninedust, you need to make your breakthroughs as soon as possible as well," Ning said hurriedly. "The Autarch's guidance truly is of incredible help in cultivation."

"Yes, after seeing the Autarch's Dao, I finally understood what petty, irrelevant figures we are," Ninedust said. "I've already gained many new insights, and I trust I should be able to make a breakthrough soon. Haha, I've fully memorized the Autarch's Dao-guidance! If I still can't beat the likes of Dawnstar, the Radiant King, or Dreamlore, even I would feel ashamed of myself."

"Haha, that's the spirit!" Ning laughed as well.

"My improvements are nothing. I imagine even Eternal Emperors and Hegemons would love to have a chance to gaze into the Dao-teachings of an Autarch." Ninedust shook his head. "Alas, blessings like this can only be hoped for, not counted on. I've always felt that I'm incredibly talented... if even this blessing isn't enough to propel me past the Radiant King and the others, I would view myself as nothing more than a joke."

"Hurry up and train," Ning urged. "Improve as much as you can. After we pick up our treasures, we're going to leave this world and return to the Endless Territories."

"Alright." Ninedust nodded. "I'm gonna go find those Emperor-class golems and fight them again."

"You should probably stay away from me. Otherwise, those golems will refuse to engage with you," Ning said with a laugh.

"What? Why?" Ninedust was surprised. "Did you beat them up that badly?"

"Kind of," Ning said.

"Darknorth... how many golems have you caught, exactly?" Ninedust asked rather excitedly. Emperor-class golems were definitely quite valuable; only the Sithe had them in fairly large numbers.

Ning shook his head. "I caught a few early on, but all of them are quite clever; once they saw they couldn't beat me, they refused to battle me any further."

"So how many have you captured, exactly?" Ninedust asked again.

"When you first entered the beastworld, the Emperor-class golems began to assemble. A total of thirty-two of them joined forces against me." Ning shook his head. "They really were quite cautious. Even I was put in rather dire straits by their combined powers! However, I intentionally held back some of my power, using them to temper my sword-arts. After I managed to make a new breakthrough, I suddenly struck out with full power and caught them offguard, capturing eight of them in a row. The others were frightened off at that point... and ever since then, they haven't dared to approach me."

"Eight?! If we factor in the two you caught when helping me out, then add in the two you took when we captured three from the three great clans... that means you have a total of twelve Emperor-class golems?!" Ninedust had a state of disbelief on his face. "I only have two!"

"Getting envious?" Ning smirked.

"No wonder they don't dare to approach you any further." Ninedust shook his head. "Fine, I'll go hunt them down and fight with them. When I feel I've improved as much as I can, I'll come find you."

"Alright." Ning nodded. Swoosh! Ninedust quickly soared into the distance, flying hundreds of kilometers away into a ruin-filled region. The golems knew exactly how strong Ninedust was; as a result, they feared Ning but not Ninedust! Three of the Emperor-class golems immediately appeared and surrounded the Ninedust Sectlord.

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Ning watched this all happen from afar. A few seconds later, he leapt forwards and transformed into a streak of light that shot towards the core Sithe residential zone.

"This is the place." Ning immediately came to a halt when he reached

the borders of the core region.

“You again?”

“You actually dare to invade the Sithe grounds yet again?” Four figures appeared in the distance, roaring furiously at Ning as they transformed into streaks of light and moved towards him faster than a hundred times the limits of the Heavenly Daos.

Ning just stood there, watching from afar. Ever since the weaker Emperor-class golems had refused to battle against him, Ning began to harbor designs upon these four stronger golems, each of which was on par with the eight lords of the Sacred Cities. Over the course of five hundred million years, Ning had already battled against them countless times.

Each time he would go to the very margins of the core residences. Once the battle started to go against him, he would quickly retreat. So long as he left the core residential region, these four golems would cease their pursuit. They were golems, after all; now that their original masters were dead, they would forever carry out the final tasks their masters had ordered them to do without any deviations. Only if they were forcibly bound would they follow a new master.

“The Sithe must’ve hidden quite a few treasures in the core regions, but these four won’t let me get even close to them. I can see some of them but I can’t acquire them,” Ning mused to himself. “I’ll see if I can get Ninedust to come up with a way to capture a few more of those Emperor-class golems. He can lead them and assist me in assaulting the core regions.

The Sithe truly had left quite a few treasures here. Almost all of them had been shattered, but over the course of time they had slowly healed and recovered. All of them were under guard.

Ning was quite intrigued by them, but he just wasn’t strong enough to take them; he needed help! Alas, the Emperor-class golems refused to even go near him, giving him no chance at all. The rest was up to Ninedust. Ninedust was viewed as much less dangerous, which meant he actually had a shot as he was able to lure the Emperor-class golems out of hiding. He might actually be able to capture a few more.

Chapter 30: Attack

Within the Sithe ruins.

“That ‘Ninedust’ fellow is much weaker than Darknorth. Its been a few million years, but he hasn’t been able to catch any of us.”

“That’s normal! Did you think that every Daolord was as much of a freak as Daolord Darknorth is?”

The Emperor-class golems were excited to battle against Ninedust. Ninedust had indeed improved, and quite a bit at that! But with the Emperor-class golems all helping each other out, Ninedust had not been able to catch any of them during the past few million years.

“Endless.” Ninedust spun the longstaff in his hands, his staff surrounded by thousands of whirlpools as it furiously swept towards the four Emperor-class golems attacking him. Two of them had assumed invisible forms which tied Ninedust down, while the other two fought Ninedust head-on.

“Traceless!” Ninedust let out a furious shot, his longstaff dramatically expanding in length as he lashed downwards at the warhammer-wielding golem in front of them. The golem hurriedly lifted its warhammer up above its head, seeking to block the attack.

Boom! The longstaff twisted slightly in an almost whip-like fashion as it smashed towards the warhammer. An invisible ripple of power was transmitted from the longstaff to the warhammer, slamming directly into the golem’s body. Instantly, the golem’s entire body trembled as it was sent stumbling backwards, then fell into a seated position on the ground.

“Careful, Warsky!” Another one of the Emperor-class golems hurriedly ran over to help.

It was one against four, but Ninedust wasn’t at any disadvantage at all! The two sides had battled evenly for quite some time, with Ninedust clearly being much more powerful than before.

“Haha...” Ninedust suddenly began to laugh loudly as a formation-

diagram suddenly appeared with his palm. The formation-diagram quickly flew out and expanded in size to cover an area of ten million kilometers!

“What?!”

“We’ve been trapped.”

“A formation?”

The four Emperor-class golems were all shocked. As for the distant golems who were just watching, they were stunned as well. Ninedust had battled against them for many years, but he had never used such an insidious technique like this before! It was rare for them to encounter a worthy opponent, and so they quite enjoyed the chance to battle against Ninedust... but who would’ve thought that they’d suddenly fall into a trap?

“Daolord Ninedust, I didn’t realize you were such a despicable person.”

“Damnit.” The four golems were incomparably enraged. In the past, they had heard Ning address the Ninedust Sectlord as ‘Ninedust’, and so they naturally believed that Daolord Ninedust was his proper title. Ninedust himself naturally didn’t bother to explain or correct the misunderstanding.

“Despicable? Hah! How am I despicable? Because of the orders the Sithe gave you, you’ve been stuck here guarding this rubble for countless aeons. Aren’t you bored out of your minds yet? When the three clan leaders caught your comrades, they would wipe out your golem-spirits and instill new ones. I, however, can guarantee that I won’t wipe your spirits out when I take you out of here,” Ninedust said loudly. “You’ll be able to see a much more colorful world. It’ll be a helluva lot better than guarding this place for sure!”

“Don’t waste time talking to him.”

“Come on then.”

“Get ready to die!” The golems were blindly loyal and devoted; although they were curious about the outside world, as golems they would never think to disobey the orders of their masters. This was the tragedy of golem lifeforms... and if their new masters chose to wipe out their souls, their end would only become even more tragic. It was a form of death, with the

new golem-spirit representing a completely different and new sentience.

“Darknorth!” Ninedust called out loudly. Swoosh! The distant Ning had already transformed into a streak of light that was flying towards this place at high speed. Although he was hundreds of millions of kilometers away, he moved faster than a hundred times the speed of light and thus was quickly able to reach and move into the formation area, passing through the barriers with ease.

“You finally made your move,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Hurry up and help me catch them!” Ninedust urged.

The two would naturally be able to capture these four Emperor-class golems much more quickly if they worked together. Two of the golems had invulnerable forms and would be a bit tougher to deal with, but Ning’s attacks were now so powerful that he was able to deplete their energy stores quite quickly. Before the formation even had a chance to dissipate, they had already been exhausted and captured ‘alive.’

After putting away the golems, Ninedust willed the formation around them to dissipate.

“Look at those golems over there.” Ning pointed off into the distance, where a number of golems were hiding behind a barrier. The golems were staring towards the two of them with mixed looks in their eyes; their gazes were filled with eagerness, anger, and indifference.

“In their heart of hearts, they would love to leave this place with us.” Ninedust nodded as well. “But they are not only afraid of having their spirits wiped out, they are also bound by their original orders to stay at this place. Alas...”

“If they continue to hide inside, there’s certainly no way for us to take them out of here.” Ning shook his head. As Ning and Ninedust saw it, they were helping these golems out by taking them away from this place! Eventually, Ning and Ninedust would die after they most likely failed their Daomerges, but the golems possessed perpetual life; they would be given to new masters and would continue to live exciting lives. To be trapped here within the Sithe ruins was far too meaningless an existence.

“We aren’t strong enough yet.” Ning shook his head. “We can’t help them.” Ning had tested himself against the barriers long ago, but even though only a few fragmented barriers remained, the likes of him remained unable to damage them in the slightest.

“Right. I haven’t had a chance to congratulate you on finally mastering those ultimate attacks of yours,” Ning said. The plan he and Ninedust had settled upon was for Ninedust to first use these golems to temper his staff-arts. Only after truly mastering his new ultimate attack would Ninedust actually move to capture them.

“I came up with a few killer attacks back in Crimsonwave Temple, but each had their own flaws. After having a chance to view the Autarch’s Daos, I was able to perfect those killer attacks and then come up with my three ultimate attacks: ‘Boundless’, ‘Endless’, and ‘Traceless’. These three ultimate attacks of mine are just as strong as the three ultimate attacks used by the Radiant King... and perhaps they are stronger!” Ninedust said confidently, “Who knows? I might be able to defeat Daolord Dreamlore and be ranked as the third Daolord in all the Endless Territories.”

Ning nodded. He agreed with this assessment. Ninedust definitely was on the same level as Dawnstar and Dreamlore by now. As for who would win in an actual fight? That could only be determined on the field of battle.

“Rest for a bit. After your formation-treasure has regenerated its power, we’re going to go attack the core regions of the ruins,” Ning said.

“Agreed.” Ninedust turned solemn. Attacking the core region would be extremely dangerous, the entire reason they had come here was in search of a Sithe fortune to claim. They had gained quite a bit from the Autarch’s Dao, but that wasn’t the reason they had come here.

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Another three days went past. Finally, Ning and Ninedust simultaneously arrived at the outer borders to the region which held the core Sithe residential ruins.

“No one is permitted to trespass within Sithe territory! Daolord

Darknorth, you've already trespassed repeatedly... and now, you are bringing another Daolord with you?" The four figures flew over, eyes filled with murder. These were the four golems comparable to the lords of the Sacred Cities. These were the four most powerful golems in all the Sithe ruins.

However, this wasn't always the case. Long ago, these four golems were nothing more than ordinary guard-golems stationed to the core regions. Those onyx humanoids had Hegemon levels of power and were the mainstays in battle! Alas, the strongest had been either completely destroyed or taken away by the Autarch. In the end, only four of the ordinary guard-golems were able to slowly repair themselves and recover. These four 'ordinary' golems, however, posed an enormous degree of danger to Ning and Ninedust. They were on the level of the lords of the Sacred Cities, after all!

"Daolord Darknorth, you've always been quite careful."

"You've never dared to truly risk it all."

"How about this? Only two of us four will participate in this battle. You can fight us in a two-on-one fight, but we're going to fight over there, rather than here in the border areas," the four golems said. By now, they knew Ning far too well.

Ning just shouted back, "The four of you are extraordinarily strong. I really need to act with more caution instead." The four golems were truly strong; even when Ning was focusing on defensive sword-arts, he could easily die from their blows. Thus, he only challenged them in the outer regions where he could immediately retreat once things started to go south.

"Attack!"

"Kill Darknorth's companion first."

"Darknorth's been here countless times. Let's remind him of just how fearsome we can be." The four figures had been thoroughly pissed off by Ning quite some time ago.

Ning and Ninedust stood shoulder-to-shoulder. "You ready?" Ning sent mentally.

"No worries," Ninedust replied. "I'm more than ready." In truth, Ninedust was feeling quite nervous as well.

"We'll succeed," Ning said. He was a bit anxious as well.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! The four golems howled through the air, moving at different speeds but all surpassing a hundred times the speed of light.

"This is the perfect moment. Attack!" Ning shouted mentally. A black rune-diagram suddenly appeared within Ning and Ninedust's palms. This was a single-use formation treasure! An enormous black whirlpool appeared and rapidly expanded, with over a thousand layers of energy swirling around it. Every single layer of energy was filled with countless complicated formations, and the entire black whirlpool quickly covered the two golems who were the fastest and had charged closest to them.

Ning and Ninedust both used one of the black formation-diagrams, which meant two of the black whirlpools had appeared. One was aimed inwards while the other was aimed outwards, simultaneously trapping and repelling their foes.

"Go!" Ninedust then took out normal formation-diagram treasure, the single-use one he had acquired from the ancestral Hegemon of the Ancients which could only be used after charging.

Boom! An enormous formation that was round within and square without suddenly appeared, filled with countless layers of dense barriers. This formation immediately surrounded the outermost black whirlpool barrier.

A total of three formations were being used to trap these two Emperor-class golems!

Chapter 31: The Estate-Spirit's Treasures

“Damn!”

“Formations?”

“Break! Break! Break for me!” The two trapped golems bellowed with rage as they furiously assaulted the formation. Multiple layers of formations began to tremble, with a few of the innermost layers actually beginning to split apart. However, they quickly managed to regenerate.

Ninedust was stunned by what he saw. He sent mentally, “They really are strong. Darknorth, these two golems are way too strong.”

“That’s why I came up with the idea of using a trifecta of formations against them. We need to trap them there for as long as we can. Speed is the name of the game here!” Ji Ning stared at the two slower golems who were charging straight towards them. He certainly didn’t dare to trap all four golems at once, because they had a way to merge their power together. In that situation, the formation would probably last only ten to twenty percent as long as it should!

“Let’s go!” Ning roared angrily. Swoosh! He charged forwards by himself, moving towards the tall, skinny golem wielding a pair of enormous scimitars.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Ning immediately began to battle against the tall, skinny golem. Saber-light flashed everywhere, and each blow was incredibly heavy. Ning couldn’t help but feel a sense of extreme pressure.

“You won’t be able to stop us, Daolord Darknorth!” The fourth and slowest golem was a muscular golem who wielded an enormous greataxe, and he came charging straight towards Ning.

“Go!” Ning willed it. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! A total of twelve Emperor-class golems suddenly appeared in the empty void next to him. These were all the Emperor-class golems Ning currently owned. As for Ninedust, he also let out a furious shout as he released his four Emperor-class golems. Although he had six total, two of them had other

assignments to take care of.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Ning's twelve golems and Ninedust's four launched a simultaneous attack against the greataxe-wielding golem. Swoosh! Five of the sixteen golems had invulnerable forms, and they transformed into a five-colored rope that began to coil around the greataxe-wielding golem. As for the other eleven, they began to surround and attack it as well.

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Ning was able to fight against thirty-two Emperor-class golems simultaneously thanks to his Shadowless evasion art, his Soleheart stance, and his Yin-Yang defenses. This greataxe golem, however, relied primarily on brute force! Thus, the sixteen Emperor-class golems were actually able to tie it down once they entered battle against it.

"Ninedust, hurry up and go get those treasures!" Ning sent mentally.

"Leave it to me." Ninedust immediately charged towards the core regions with his two remaining golems by his side.

"Stop! STOP!" The two golems trapped within the formation-diagram were enraged.

"You won't be able to escape." Ning continued to battle against the tall, skinny golem. These golems all had their own strengths and weaknesses, and Ning had incorporated them into his calculations for this plan! The slow, greataxe-wielding golem was the strongest, and thus Ning left it up to his sixteen golems to fight against it. This was because all Emperor-class golems had incredibly tough bodies and didn't fear brute-force attacks; what they truly feared were sly, crafty attacks.

Ning, for example, was dealing with just that as he fought against the golem wielding two giant scimitars. Saber-light was flying everywhere in an unpredictable manner! Sixteen golems probably wouldn't be enough to tie it down, and so Ning had taken on that responsibility fearlessly.

Slash! Slash! Slash! Sword-light and saber-light clashed against each other repeatedly. Ning's sword was faster and more unpredictable, but it

was slightly weaker. However... he was using a total of six swords! Thus, he was able to tie this tall, skinny golem down and ensure that it was tied down as well and unable to escape.

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With the formation-diagrams, Ji Ning, and the sixteen Emperor-class golems working in harmony, all four guardian golems were temporarily tied down. Right at this moment, Ninedust led his two golems in search of treasures.

“Go over there!”

“Try over here.”

“Smash that apart!” Ninedust gave out one order after another, sending his golems into the more dangerous areas he encountered. The golems were all top-grade Eternal treasures and weren’t easy to damage.

“Haha! Nice treasure.”

“This treasure is actually able to affect spacetime?”

“Take this one with us.” The central residences were littered with formation-diagrams, strange gemstones inlaid in stone pillars, and strange mechanisms which had unknown purposes. The Ninedust Sectlord took every single thing he saw! It didn’t matter if he saw an immediate use for them or not; he’d worry about that once they got out of this place. For now, his goal was to take away everything he could.

After just twenty seconds, Ninedust had swept away virtually all of the items in the territory protected by the four golems, with the exception of two places which were protected by residual barriers and which couldn’t be entered.

Swoosh! Ninedust immediately fled at maximum speed. “Darknorth, let’s go!” Ninedust’s voice echoed within the ruins.

“Haha, thanks for everything!” Ning led his sixteen golems in a rapid retreat. Although the two golems attacking him tried to pursue him, there was simply no way for them to catch up. After Ning fled out of the central

regions, the golems immediately halted their attacks and went to help their other comrades break free from the three layers of formations.

By now, the formations had already been mostly destroyed. With all four golems working together, it took merely five seconds to completely wreck it.

“Daolord Darknorth ended up getting what he wanted.” The four golems all sighed amongst themselves.

“The Sithe in this place died out long ago; those treasures weren’t doing any good. If he took them, he took them.”

“Ugh. We’re supposed to guard this place, but what are we guarding? Our masters died long ago...”

The four golems had to guard this place and follow the final orders they were given, which was why they had repeatedly intervened to stop Ning. In truth, they personally didn’t care about the treasures at all. In fact, they had long ago felt that their solitary life was boring and pointless.

“Life had been much more interesting lately with Darknorth around.”

“Agreed.”

“Now that he has the treasures he wants, he’s probably going to leave. We’re about to go back to our normal, boring life.”

“I thought that we’d be able to hold him back and we’d fight each other for a couple thousand chaos cycles. Who would’ve thought he’d get the treasures so soon?” The guardian golems all felt rather regretful. It had been a long, long time since they had felt challenged.

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The Sithe who had been living in the ruins had died long ago, with the golems bound by the final orders they had given before dying. Only if someone was able to forcibly abduct and bind the golems would their destinies be changed.

The lion statue’s mouth suddenly opened. Ning and Ninedust flew into the mouth, entering the beastworld within.

“Greetings, senior.” Both Ning and Ninedust bowed respectfully towards the black-robed man standing in the void before them.

“You’ve both improved quite a bit, especially you Darknorth. There’s a limit to how strong Daolords can be, and you had already reached an extremely high level of power... and now, you’ve made great gains yet again. Impressive,” the black-robed man nodded in praise. Although he had been left behind by the Autarch to safeguard this beastworld, he had never heard of an Omega Sword Dao and thus had reached a wrong estimation of Ning’s abilities.

Once Ning became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, he would become truly powerful.

“I’ll give each of you a treasure.” The black-robed elder waved his hand, causing a blood-red medallion with the imprint of a claw atop it to appear.

“Ninedust, this is for you.” The black-robed elder handed the item to the Ninedust Sectlord.

“Thank you, senior.” Ninedust excitedly accepted the strange blood claw-medallion, but once he gained it he couldn’t find anything special about it no matter how he scanned it. He glanced at the black-robed man with some confusion: “Senior, might I ask what this treasure...?”

“Haha, I’ll also give you a copy of a chaos star map.” The black-robed man waved his hand, causing an astral scroll to appear. He unfurled the astral scroll, which mapped out an enormous region of darkness as well as three realmverses around it.

“Here are the three closest realmverses,” the black-robed man said. “This is the Multilight Realmverse. This is the Redcastle Realmverse. And this is the Flamedragon Realmverse. This Sithe warship we’re in has been drifting through the Great Dark for endless ages. Based on the trajectory and speed at which we were moving, I imagine we should be close to these three realmverse by now. The two of you should be from one of these three realmverses, right?”

“Senior, how is it that you know we are from the outside and are not cultivators local to this planet?” Ninedust asked curiously.

“Haha, as soon as you broke through the outermost layer of deepfire blackstone surrounding the vessel, I was able to sense you.” The black-robed man nodded and smiled.

Ning and Ninedust now understood. “We came from the Flamedragon Realmverse; this place is fairly close to the Flamedragon Realmverse,” Ninedust said.

“What a coincidence. The Flamedragon Realmverse has a special place within it that was created and left behind by my master.” The black-robed man continued, “If you bear this medallion... so long as you are close enough to that place, you’ll be able to sense it through this medallion. You’ll be able to use it to teleport yourself directly inside.”

“Where is it?” Ning and Ninedust were both curious.

“Around here.” The astral map rapidly zoomed in on the Flamedragon Realmverse, revealing a specific place.

“Is that...?” Ning and Ninedust were both shocked. “Inside the Aeonian Kingdom?!”

Both of them had extraordinarily high statuses within the Endless Territories. Thus, they naturally knew where the headquarters of the Aeonians, one of the six great powers of the Endless Territories, was located! The place the black-robed man had just marked out was within the Aeonian Kingdom. The Aeonian Kingdom was an incredibly mysterious place; although there were very few Aeonians, especially strong ones, the Aeonian Kingdom allowed them to sit securely as one of the six major powers of the Endless Territories.

Chapter 32: Verdant Azuresoul

Ninedust said helplessly, “Senior, you might not know this, but the place you just pointed out is within an inconceivably powerful treasure known as the ‘Aeonian Kingdom’! The Aeonian Kingdom is an extremely dangerous place; not even Hegemons dare to charge into that place.”

The Dao Alliance and the Aeonians were mortal enemies; Aeonians relied on devouring countless Daolords to awaken the Aeonian blood within their veins! The more they devoured, the more powerful they would become! If it wasn’t for the fact that they could take shelter within the Aeonian Kingdom, the Aeonians would’ve been completely genocided by the Dao Alliance long ago!

“Haha...” the black-robed elder laughed. “It doesn’t matter how dangerous it is; you don’t need to worry at all. This medallion will tear straight through spacetime and teleport you directly inside. If the situation turns grim, you can use it to immediately tear through spacetime and leave again. This medallion was personally forged by my master, Autarch Bolin. Not even Hegemons would be able to trap you.”

Ninedust let out a sigh of relief, then immediately asked, “Would I be able to bring Darknorth with me?”

“The medallion can only be used by one person,” the black-robed man said. “It can also only be used to bring one person in escaping from that place.”

“Ah?!” Ninedust was startled.

“Buuut, you can pull Darknorth into your estate-world before using the medallion. That solves, it yes?” The black-robed man laughed.

Ninedust immediately looked at Ning. “Darknorth, things are going to be quite dangerous inside the Aeonian Kingdom. Accompany me?”

“For sure.” Ning knew that in truth, Ninedust was actually helping him out rather than vice versa. With that medallion in hand, Ninedust wouldn’t need to even fear an entire host of Hegemons. What sort of

‘danger’ would he be afraid of?

“Right. You must remember this.” The black-robed man said seriously, “The power contained within this medallion is only enough to activate it twice in a row; after that, the power will be used up and it’ll shatter. Thus, the medallion is only good for a single entry and exit. Treasure this opportunity and do not waste it.”

“It’ll be exhausted after just two uses?” Ninedust was started, but he then let out an uncaring smile. “A single such opportunity and blessing is already more than enough.”

The black-robed man nodded slightly. He was quite approving of Ninedust’s attitude. He then turned to look at Ning. “I didn’t expect for you to be able to improve so dramatically, given how powerful you already were. Even I am now eager to see what you will be like if you succeed in your Daomerge. Given your power, once you succeed in the Daomerge you will definitely surpass any ‘ordinary’ Hegemon. You’ll probably be on par with Otherverse Lords.”

“Are Otherverse Lords very powerful?” Ning asked curiously.

“Yes. They are in control of alternate universes and are assisted by the prime essences of those universes. How can they NOT be strong?” The black-robed man continued, “And you helped me out as well. Given how much you improved... let me think about what I should give you...”

“Helped you out?” Ninedust glanced at Ning, puzzled. Ning was puzzled as well; since when did he help this estate-spirit out?

“You didn’t know this,” the black-robed man explained, “But when my master Autarch Bolin entered this place, he used an evasion art to directly bypass the deepfire blackstone and enter the vessel. He furiously massacred all of the Sithe, wrecking all of their defenses and destroying everyone and everything here. Afterwards, he tossed me here and then immediately tore through spacetime to depart. He was hurrying off to other regions to take part in the battles there.”

“But... Master forgot that the entire vessel was encased in a shell of deepfire blackstone. There was no way for me to leave!” The black-robed

man said helplessly, “Ugh... master created so many beastworlds and he scattered them casually throughout the Chaosverse. He probably didn’t think too much of it when he tossed me here, and he had to seize every moment because war had spread throughout the realms. He didn’t take the time needed to actually break through the deepfire blackstone, as it would take some time even for someone as strong as him to tear through it by force.”

Ning and Ninedust now both understood. Deepfire blackstone was almost indestructible; even Hegemons like Hegemon Welkin were completely unable to do anything to it. It would take even an Autarch some time to forcibly break through the outer ‘wall’ protecting this Sithe warship. Autarch Bolin wasn’t willing to waste any time and so had used an evasion art to teleport straight inside.

“Darknorth, when you used your lifeblood weapon to drain away the deepfire blackstone, you also gave me the chance to leave.” The black-robed man smiled. “That naturally means you helped me out. I’ll now be able to move through spacetime to visit other places and search for other lucky people to bestow good fortune upon.”

“Mm...” The black-robed man was silent for a moment. “And you really have improved dramatically. I suppose giving you that treasure would be a decent choice.”

Whoosh. A round, fist-sized object suddenly appeared out of nowhere within the black-robed man’s hands. It looked like a giant egg, and it emanated strange ripples that caused both Ning and Ninedust to feel entranced by it. Their Dao-hearts were both influenced by this effect, causing them to feel the urge to devour the thing.

“My master, Autarch Bolin, has left behind some treasures in each beastworld... and this is the most valuable of the treasures I have.” The black-robed man looked at Ning. “This is known as a ‘verdant azuresoul’! Any and every Hegemon would go absolutely crazy over this.”

Ning and Ninedust were both startled.

“Later, both of you must swear oaths not to divulge any information

about what has happened here,” the black-robed man said solemnly.

“Understood.”

“Don’t worry, senior.” Ning and Ninedust both hurriedly assented, while Ning stared at the egg-shaped object with an eager look in his eyes.

“The various realmverses of the vast Chaosverse are not truly eternal. There are certain destructive forces of nature within the Chaoseverse,” the black-robed man said. “There are certain terrifying celestial bodies, such as the ‘Ship of Mirrors’, the ‘Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels’, the ‘Apocalypse Star’, and more. Even Hegemons are helpless in the face of these naturally occurring celestial bodies, and they can easily annihilate entire realmverses. Even Autarchs need to pay enormous prices if they wish to be able to deal with them.”

Ning and Ninedust were both surprised. They knew that the Flamedragon Realmverse was facing a grave danger from the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, but who would’ve thought there were multiple celestial bodies in the Chaosverse akin to the Wheels?

“The Ship of Mirrors, the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, the Apocalypse Star... they are not living entities,” the black-robed man said. “However, the Chaosverse can also give birth to supremely terrifying creatures known as ‘Chaos Primordials’ that are just as deadly. Supposedly, these great beasts are born from the prime essences of the Chaosverse. Once they leave the prime essences, they’ll voyage through the Chaosverse... and they love to eat the realmverses they encounter.”

“Chaos Primordials are born with nigh-indestructible bodies and are incredibly few in number. They are also fairly unintelligent, perhaps on par with mortal children. However, they are so incredibly strong that only Autarchs are capable of killing them. Even Otherverse Lords are only able to just barely fend them off.”

“This ‘verdant azuresoul’ is what Chaos Primordials love to eat beyond all other types of food.” The black-robed man looked at Ning and Ninedust. “My master, Autarch Bolin, has made some special modifications to this one, converting it into a magic treasure. Darknorth,

you'll be able to bind it with ease just by dripping your blood onto it. After doing so, if you ever manage to encounter a Chaos Primordial, you can toss the verdant azuresoul over to it and let the beast eat it... and once it does so, the modified verdant azuresoul will take control over the Chaos Primordial and make it a servant that obeys your commands."

Ning and Ninedust were both speechless upon hearing this. "Can I use the 'verdant azuresoul' as payment to have an Autarch reverse the flows of spacetime to revive a Celestial Immortal?" Ning couldn't help but ask.

"You cannot. A single verdant azuresoul isn't valuable enough," the black-robed man explained. "However, if you can find a Chaos Primordial and have it eat the verdant azuresoul, then give that Chaos Primordial to an Autarch? That would be enough to convince the Autarch to intervene."

"Chaos Primordials are simply too rare, while the endless Chaosverse is far too vast. Finding one is a matter of luck," the black-robed man said. "Alright. I've already given you each what you deserve. Remember – you are not permitted to tell others of what you encountered here," the black-robed man instructed.

"Understood."

Ning and Ninedust both immediately swore lifeblood oaths. Ning and Ninedust then felt space twist around them, followed by them reappearing within the Sithe ruins.

"I'm leaving now," the statue said. Suddenly, it transformed into an actual three-headed leonine beast that transformed into a streak of light that flew out of the mountains. "If you can succeed in your Daomerges, perhaps we might meet again."

Ning and Ninedust both watched as the statue flew away.

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A short while later, Ning and Ninedust left the Sithe ruins as well, returning to the surface of the planet.

Hundreds of millions of years had gone by. By now, Darknorth Palace had reached an utterly towering level of strength, while the three great

clans remained hidden within their headquarters and not daring to come out.

The three great clans were simply terrified. They had always relied on their clan leaders, who had been completely wiped out. They naturally didn't dare to take any further risks, and thus they had come to a decision: "After 108,000 chaos cycles, our three great clans will once more make our presence known within the world. By then, Daolord Darknorth would've definitely died. I refuse to believe that such a freakishly strong Daolord can succeed in the Daomerge."

Ning and Ninedust secretly inspected the world for a period of time, then quietly slipped away without causing any damage to the barriers or wards surrounding the three great clans.

"Time to leave."

"Let's go back to the Endless Territories." With the treasures they had acquired from the Sithe lands in tow, Ning and Ninedust embarked upon their return journey.

By now, Ning had reached an even more profound level in his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop. It was now much more powerful, and thus as the two tore through spacetime in the Great Dark they only had to spend a total of a bit over three hundred years before they reached the Endless Territories again.

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